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"HELLO! WIE GAHTS! HOW YOU WAS DUTCHY?" KIT SALUTED FAMILIARLY."

Kit, the Denver Sport;

OR,

THE BONANZA MINER KING.

BY E. L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"ROSEBUD ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

A PUSHING BOY.

"SAY, mister, be you the boss of these hyer diggin's?"

The one who uttered this query was a mere boy in years, probably not over sixteen, and looked even younger, owing to his shortness in stature.

He had, however, every appearance of robust health, and his round face would have been prepossessing had some of the dirt been washed from it. His eyes were sharp in their dusky glance; his well-formed mouth, with its wag-gish sort of twist in one corner, indicated a predominant trait in the boy's sunny nature; his hair was curly, and of a brick-red color.

His attire consisted only of a ragged calico shirt, a pair of trowsers several sizes too large, with holes at the knee, and a cap without a frontispiece. His mud-splashed feet were guiltless of boots or shoes, and his general appearance indicated that he had tramped long and far.

The person whom he addressed was a tall, handsome fellow, attired in miner's habiliments. His eyes were brown, and yet penetrating; his hair and his graceful mustache were a shade or so lighter than the hair of the youth.

The scene was the heart of a rugged gulch, where two scores of miners were busily engaged in mining with pan and shovel, while the young man spoken to was leaning idly against a rock, watching the men at work, and appeared to be a boss.

An expression of annoyance passed over his face as he turned to gaze at the boy.

"What's that your business?" he demanded, gruffly.

"Lots, you bet!" the young ragamuffin replied, with a wink. "Ye needn't be so cranky because a feller axed yer a 'portant question."

"Who are you?—what do you want?"

"I want ter know ef you be the high-cockolorum what owns these hyer diggin's?"

"No, I am not. What of it?"

"Dash it, yer as short as pie-crust. I jest wanted ter find out. I'm Redtop Christopher, or Christopher Redtop, or Kit, the Denver Sport—jest as ye please—all the way from Denver, and I want work. Oh, I'm a bouncer, you'd better believe, if my hair is like yours—a rich auburn," and the vagabond grinned at his joke.

"Auburn! I should say so, you red monkey's brother. What are you out in this wild country for, anyway? Why, you're nothin' but the stub of a cigar—a runt of a boy—a mere kid!"

"Oh, you dry up on that, mister. Don't kid

me, 'eave I'm sorter sawed off, alongside o' you. I'm sixteen, and hev come ter stay, till I kerry back a gold brick big as a hoss-car. What I want is work, whar I can git a livin', and lay by some shekels, in view of buyin' out a railroad or two one o' these days."

"Well, I reckon you've struck the wrong town, my lad. Slim chances of your getting a job hereabouts, I fear. Kangaroos are at a discount just now."

"Git out! Guv me a job yonder. I can handle a shovel like a Patrick, you bet!"

"I have nothing to do with hiring the men. I simply see that they keep to work."

"Oh, I see—you're gang boss. Whar's the money boss? He's ther hairpin I wanter interview, you bet."

"Mr. Lyons has not returned from Chicago. He will likely be back in a day or two. Then, you might strike him."

"A day or two! Jumpin' Jerusalem, how d'ye 'spect a feller to wait a day or two, when he hain't had nothin' to eat fer four weeks and a half? D'ye 'spect him ter chaw grass, or subsist on ther pine-scented breeze? Reckon you never was hungry!"

"I generally git hungry about meal-time!" was the dry reply, with a glance at his watch—for it lacked but a few minutes of quitting time, which was at sunset.

"Say, mister, what's yer name?" the young Bricktop demanded, rather aggressively.

"You're too inquisitive, my kid," was the quiet retort.

"Not a bit of it! How's a feller ever to get along, ef he don't learn who's who?"

The overseer eyed the lad a moment, keenly, then put his hand in his pocket, and drew forth several pieces of silver money.

"Here, you young tramp, take this and clear out. My name is Sandy. Git, now!" he ordered sharply.

"You bet, Sandy, old stockin's. You're jest a prime sort ov nabob, you be, and I'll be yer humble sarvent pervidin' yer ain't too sassy! I'll jest go an' surprise my digestive apparatus wi' as big a set-out as ther state of my finances will admit. Know of ary 'stablishment where a feller kin git the worth of my money?"

"A Jew keeps a grub-shop up in camp. Go there!"

"All right. Much oblige to you. I'll go an' eat him out, an' then go interview Boss Lyons's gal, an' see if I can't indooce her to work me in fer a job!" and he marched off, whistling as merrily as though he were a born duke.

"Queer chap!" Sandy muttered, gazing thoughtfully after him. "He's got brass enough to carry himself through the world, I'll vow, if he don't acquire any of the more precious metals. At first, I almost fancied I had seen his face, before; but of course I am mistaken. He is probably some young runaway, from Omaha or Denver."

He paid no further attention to Kit, but turned toward the miners, several of whom had indulged in "shirking" while he was busied in conversation with the little tramp.

Ghoul Gulch Diggings, owned and controlled by James Lyons, of whom mention has been made, and the town, or mining-camp, known as

Ghoul Gulch, were located about a quarter of a mile apart.

The diggings were extensive, both as placer and quartz vein, but Mr. Lyons owned the whole of the yielding territory where prospecting had thus far discovered any gold, and would not allow any habitations or other buildings on his property, except his quartz-mill, and his own private residence, which was built of stone, and far more pretentious than any other residence in that section of country.

The mining-camp had been situated further up the gulch, and consisted, besides its dwellings, of a couple of general stores—a tavern boasting of the name of the Grand Union—a smithy, restaurant, several saloons, public gambling-houses and dance-halls.

The population was rather mixed as to nationality, and was daily increasing, as Lyons's lucky strike a few months before our story had led people to believe that there must surely be other productive territory besides his in that vicinity.

The restaurant of which Sandy had made mention to Kit was located near the head of the camp, and was owned and managed by a ponderous cross between a Jew and a German, who rejoiced in the name of Hans Glockenspiel.

Such of the miners as couldn't afford to pay the charge of the Grand Union, or had no homes of their own, generally patronized Hans's place; consequently he did a living business. Having money, he also dabbled a little in pawnbroking, on a small scale, having frequent opportunities to take in various things for a very insignificant loan, which nine times out of ten were never redeemed.

Kit at last spied the den, and before entering paused to count the money which Sandy had given him.

"I reckon, I'd better not go in too heavy, on ther stummick, 'til I'm sure ov a job!" he soliloquized. "I've got only seventy-five cents hyer, an' that wouldn't go fur in payin' for wittles. Wonder ef I can't work a racket on his giblets? Never try, never suck—eggs, eh! Well, here goes!"

He strutted into the little one-story edifice, where Hans held forth, with the air of a full-fledged bonanza king.

The fat-faced, big-bodied proprietor was within the eating bar, perched on a stool, and engaged in seeking solace in powerful whiffs from a huge meerschaum pipe.

"Hello! Wie gahts! How you was, Dutchy?" Kit saluted, familiarly. "Is this ther place where a feller gits ther worth of his ducats in grub?"

"Dot ish der ferry blace!" Hans declared. "You goes mit der Grand Union, und you got noddings but silver-vare und shiney. You gomes here mit my blace, und I gives you v'ot you can eat, sheep as haff v'ot you pay der odder blace."

"Squerect! that's ther prime ticket! All I wants is the worth o' my money. Have you got any quail on toast, egg-flitters and snap-peper soup?"

"V'ot you dakes me for? I keebs no Broadway blace. You gets beef und potatoes, mit breadt und coffee—dot's all!"

"Well, my appetite ain't werry fastidgus, to-day, so fetch it along!"

The steaming hot edibles were soon placed in front of the young vagabond, and he "pitched into" them with a will.

When one square meal had vanished, he looked up, wistfully.

"Hain't got no stewed American eagle, or burro chowder, hev you?" he asked.

"I dell's you I keep no such stuff!"

"Nor fricasseed taran'tler, ala mode icy parle on francaise!"

"No! no!" Hans blustered. "You got youst all v'at you get."

"Oh! well, considerin' the lattertude I'm in, mebbe I hev got the worth of my money. Here's yer ten cents!"

"Ten cents!" roared Hans, growing apoplectic. "V'y, young vellers, I charge you seventy-five cents for v'ot you haff."

"Git out, you overgrown cheese. Didn't you tell me you'd give me the worth of my money? Now, what you kickin' about? I'm satisfied with what I got for ten cents!"

"But, my poy, you don'd vas understood v'ot I mean. I gives you a *pig* meal, und sharges you seventy-five cents."

"Oh! I see. Well, just charge it—name's Kit, an' when I strike a pay streak, I'll come around and settle. Thanks for your liberality. Will drap in ag'in, 'beut breakfast time. By-by, old bologna!"

And sliding from his stool, the Denver Sport started for the door.

The suspicious sound of click! click! caused him to suddenly pause and look back, to behold a formidable revolver in the Dutchman's grasp, and a determined expression upon his rubicund visage.

"Hello! goin' ter shoot, eh?" Kit inquired, anxiously.

"You bet! Youst you hand ofer dot odder sixty-five cents, or I plow off der hull of you scranium!"

"Ye needn't put yerself to so much trouble, Dutchy. I've got use fer this lodging-house o' philosofy, fer years to come, yet. Heers yer ducats, ye stingy old sauer-kraut barrel—every red I've got, 'cept my hair. Wait till I patronize yer pig-pen ag'in! O-oh! wouldn't I like to bite off yer nose, tho'? By the way—can't ye give a feller a job?"

"Gif you noddings! You git!"

"You bet. Requiscat in peace, old lager!"

And the boy glided from the place with considerable less grace than when he had entered it.

"Thet old porkypine don't take ter little cherubims, like me, I guess," Kit observed, as he sauntered away, feeling much the better for his meal. "Them wittles war like ker'sene ile on troubled waters, tho'. Another pound o' that beef would 'a' made me feel like a fightin'-cock. Hello! thar goes ther bullgine whistle at the breaker, fer ther hands ter quit. 'Spect ef I wanter interview Miss Laurel Lyons, I better be doin' it."

He directed his footsteps, then, toward the residence of the bonanza king, as James Lyons was called by all who knew him.

The handsome stone dwelling had been built in a grove of maples, which was surrounded by a

hedge. An abundance of shrubs choked up the grounds, wherein were arbors, serpentine walks, and rustic seats.

Kit found the heavy gate open, and therefore had no difficulty in gaining access to the grounds.

He paused to gaze about him, when a voice drew his attention to a grotto-like arbor, near at hand.

"What do you want here, young man?"

The voice was sharp and high pitched, that of a woman, evidently far beyond her thirties, with a sharp face, but with a simpering manner. Her hair was nearly as fiery "auburn" as Kit's own. She was dressed in a flowing wrapper of startling colors.

"Old maid, out an' out!" Kit inwardly commented. "Some ancient spinster who never caught a mash, you bet! Bin readin' poetry, too, as I'm a duck! Wonder ef I can't scrape acquaintance, and have some fun? Let me see—old maids' names aire generally Angeline—wonder how it would strike this old gal?"

He stepped toward the arbor, and doffed his hat like a born Chesterfield.

"Beg parding, lady—did you address me?" he asked, in his most gracious way.

"I asked what you want here?" the occupant of the arbor answered, a little less harshly.

"Ah, yes! Why, you see, I called to see Miss Laurel, on an errand of mercy. I wish to obtain work, you see. You, I presume, are the fair Miss Angeline?"

"Indeed! How strange! How did you come to hear of my name?"

"Easy enough. I fell in wi' a fu'st-class young feller, down hyer, a bit ago—another sorrel-top like you and I—and he spoke of you so descriptively an' endearin'ly, that I knew ye at sight. Reckon he must be stuck on you, not?"

"It—it cannot be possible that it was—it was—" and Angeline grew as rosy as a blood-beet.

"Yas, it war the identercal chap—Sandy he calls hisself. He's jest all broke up on you. He sez you're jest reg'lar old free-stone peaches an' goat's milk, wi' honey fer sweetenin'."

"Oh! fie! You are poking fun at me."

"Hope to eat my suspenders ef I am! Why, he raves 'bout you to his intermut 'quaintances like me. He privetly remarked to me that he did hev a notion fer Miss Laurel, but on mature consideration he found the diff'rence. You was sedate, stately and womanly—fit fer ther thumps an' knocks o' marriage life; no! no! them weren't 'zactly the words, but he meant you were solid, mentally an' intellectually, while Laurel war young, giddy an' girlish—unfit fer mattermonial consummation or suthin' like that."

"Oh! I can hardly believe it true. It seems so sudden—so unexpected!" and Miss Angeline's nervousness was laughable to behold.

"Yas, he sed he had neglected to make known his change of mind, because he was so timid, an' so he commissioned me ter fetch you this as an ice-breaker, to let ye know of his undying love."

Kit had picked a full-blown red rose near the gate, and he advanced and presented it to her.

Angeline was really too overcome with emotion for utterance, and Kit calculated it was high time for him to hop out.

"Ye see, Sandy didn't happen to hev any change in his pocket when he sent me—would I be too bold?" he asked, half apologetically.

"Oh! no! no! bless you, no!" Angeline exclaimed, eagerly, and out came her velvet purse in a jiffy. "Here is a dollar, my good boy. Now, please, leave me to my own sweet, sweet red rose!"

"Sold ag'in an' got the tin!" quoth the saucy vagabond as he hurried away. "What a soft old goslin' she aire anyhow. Bet a bumper she piles onter his giblets, Sandy, wi' a hull cart-load o' lollygaggin'. Phew! won't ther' be a circus then, an' won't my stock—that in the bulge of my pantaloons—go up a-kitin'! Oh! hum! Well, there's no use livin' 'cept one can have fun. Hello!"

He was some distance away by this time, when he was brought to a halt by a hand upon his shoulder.

Wheeling around he was confronted by the prettiest girl with the prettiest mischievous face and starry eyes that he had ever seen. In fact, this brown-haired, brown-eyed, rosy-cheeked vision of loveliness, in a charming, airy costume, nearly took his breath away, so great was the surprise.

"You audacious young rascal!" this vision of loveliness exclaimed, trying not to laugh. "Whatever shall I do to you, now that I have captured you?"

"Dunno! Who are you, an' what's bitin' ye?" demanded the boy, doggedly.

"Who am I, and what's bitin' me? Well! well! worse and worse! Why, Mr. Impudence, I'll have you know that there's nothing bitin' me, as you term it; and, furthermore, that I am Laurel Lyons."

"Bully! You're my mutton, then. Put 'er thar, Laurel, old gal!" and the young irrepressible put forth a powerful palm that looked decidedly as if it had not touched water in weeks.

"You dirty little vagabond, do you suppose I'd touch that terrible hand?" Miss Lyon cried, stepping back.

"Do as yer like about that. It's an honest old fist to grapple onter, tho'. So you're the boss's darter, eh?"

"I am."

"Right ye are, too. I'm a sport all the way from Denver. On account o' the peculiarity ov my propensities fer jumpin' into other folks' good graces, I'm best known as Kit, the Denver Sport. Got onter my racket wi' Angeline, did ye?"

"Yes. How did you know?"

"Judged so. What d'ye think of it?"

"It was awful bad in you. But I enjoyed it, though. Really, you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mr. Kit! A more outrageous boy I never met."

"Oh, git out! Whar'd you be 'bout that time—fer enjoyin' the circus?"

"Oh, hush! You have too much tongue."

"Nary! I'm thinkin' o' splicin' on a piece. Thet feller Sandy's yer feller, not?"

"No, sir! Mr. Impudence."

"Phew! Bet a dollar ye—"

"What do you want here, sir?" she sharply interrupted, her eyes expressing anger.

"Want to see the guv'n'er!"

"He is not at home."

"Where is he?"

"Homeward bound from Chicago."

"Who runs the roost now?"

"I do."

"You're my Salvator Rosa, then. I want a job, an' want it bad."

"I have nothing to do with my father's business arrangements, sir."

"But you've got influence. Be a good girl, now, an' work me in. I'm an orfun, wi'out ary a show 'cept what I can go fer myself. I can work like an ox, an' I ain't dainty 'bout what ther job is, neither, as long as it pans out an honest living."

Miss Lyons relented, for she gazed at the saucy stranger with a kindly smile. She was barely over eighteen herself, and yet she was gifted with more than ordinary intelligence, and could see that this boy was a diamond in the rough, and would rapidly improve by a little polish.

"Would you like to work in the mines?" she asked, kindly.

"You bet! I kin do a man's labor, if I get a man's price."

"Well, I will see what I can do for you. Ah! here comes Mr. Hawk now. He is papa's superintendent."

A gentleman in faultless attire was coming leisurely toward them from the direction of the gate—a man of swarthy complexion, with eyes, hair and mustache all dark.

He eyed Kit with a frown as he approached, and the youth returned the stare coolly.

"Good-evening, Harry," Miss Lyons accosted. "Here is a young lad who wants work in the mines. Can you give him a chance?"

"No; we have more help than we need now, and plenty of applications from able-bodied men."

"But I thought it was papa's intention to increase the force?"

"Haven't heard of it, I assure you."

"I wish you could put this young lad on. He is willing to do a man's work, and needs money to help him along in the world. I guess you can do it, can't you, Harry—if I ask you?"

"Excuse me before answering; but what's your interest in the chap? He looks like a patient tramp."

"Ef you didn't hev a red, ner no friends, you'd tramp, too!" Kit declared, spiritedly.

"Dry up!" returned Hawk.

"I simply take a merciful interest in him, sir!" Laurel responded, quietly. "It is our duty to help the poor."

"Humph! you're a first-class moralizer, Miss Laurel. Well, for your sake, I'll do what I can. If the kid has got the necessary tools he can come to work in the morning, and try it till the governor gets back. That is as far as my power goes."

"Thank you, boss. I haven't nary a tool, but ef I don't skeer up a set 'twixt now and sunrise you can set me down fer a flat."

"Look out ye don't become too sharp," Hawk warned, significantly. "If you steal you will be made to squeal, and that, too, at the end of a noose."

"When I steal, old Gabriel's trumpet will

have been used an' got rusty again!" was Kit's retort; and thrusting his hands into his pockets, and striking into a whistle, he strode away.

He had taken but a few steps when he paused and looked back.

"Hey, Miss Laurel!" he cried.

"Well, Kit?"

"I fergot ter say I'm much obligeed to ye, a hundred times. Good-night."

"Good-night. Be a good boy."

"You bet! Good-night, Mr. Hawk."

The superintendent made no answer, as he and Laurel walked on toward the house.

CHAPTER II.

SUPERINTENDENT AGAINST BOSS.

ALTHOUGH by no means a city, Ghoul Gulch was as lively a camp, after working-hours, as any other place within a hundred miles of it—in fact, it was in many respects an infant Deadwood City.

The only street was thronged with people of many conditions, faces and characters, among whom the scum and out-scourings of different cities, States and nations were noticeable; the dance-houses, saloons and gambling-dens were in full blast, with open doors; every vacant lot had some one of the catch-penny affairs on exhibition that draw forth the lucre of the unwary. It was literally a carnival of strange people, and a stranger discordant buzz of sound.

Among the principal resorts that were most attractive to the average digger of the dust, was a gambling-den known as the Mabille—a large, one-story affair, rough in its exterior, but well fitted up and furnished within, from the gorgeous bar to the magnificent gambling paraphernalia, pictures and carpets.

Facilities were here offered for playing almost every known game; not that the proprietor was profiting largely from running so extensive an establishment; she, rather, had an eye to the future, when the population greatly increased, as it seemed to be gradually doing.

For the owner was a woman—a very mysterious woman, too, of whom no one knew anything more than was to be learned by every-day observation.

She had suddenly appeared, built the place, and stocked and furnished it. She dressed in deepest black, and ever wore sufficient thickness of vail over her face to prevent any feature being discernible, except her eyes, dark and liquid, for the use of which suitable holes had been cut in the vail. She wore the tightest fitting of black gloves, and no jewelry except a gold watch and chain.

Her actions were always modest, and woe be to the one who made an improper remark in her presence.

She never spent over two out of the twenty-four hours in the place, and then it was at the gaming-tables. During other hours the place was run for her by a shrewd Spaniard, named Carlos de Castra, and a corps of attaches.

Even Carlos professed to know no more of the strange woman than the public.

She always appeared at midnight, was handed over the money, less the expenses, and departed within two hours afterward—whither, no one could find out.

She came and went like a shadow.

She seldom spoke, 'most always nodding when questioned by a customer of her place.

Her hour for coming had given her the title in Ghoul Gulch of Madam Midnight, and no one knew her as anything else.

At the tables she had varying luck, but generally won.

Other women gambled at the Mabille, as well as the Madam, but they were miners' wives whose husbands sanctioned the sport, and nothing wrong was thought of it, it being regarded as honorable and pleasant pastime.

It was in the neighborhood of midnight of the evening succeeding the events last related, and the Mabille was comfortably filled with people—for a wonder all men—the majority of whom were engaged in the various games.

At one table, and apart from any one else, sat Harry Hawk, the superintendent of the mines. He seemed to take no interest in any of the games going on around him; on the contrary, rather appeared to be watching for some one, as his gaze was turned toward the entrance of the resort.

A perceptible scowl mantled his brow, and one acquainted with him would have surmised that he was out of temper.

He glanced at his handsome watch occasionally impatiently.

"Curse the luck, why don't the fellow come?" he muttered. "He is mighty long, it strikes me."

As if in answer to his growl, the stalwart figure of Sandy, the gang boss, was seen at the other end of the room. He came leisurely into the place, with graceful step, and looking handsome in the glare of the many lights.

He was a man of some twenty-five years, or about two years the junior of Harry Hawk.

"Hi! there—this way, Sandy!" the superintendent called. "I want to see you."

Without change of his usually good-natured expression, Sandy obeyed, and paused near the table.

"Sit down," Hawk commanded.

"Sandy, what is your name? You're a queer sort of conundrum, and must have some other sort of a title."

"Sandy suits my needs, sir, and I have no use for any other!" was the evasive answer.

"But you have another?"

"Possibly. If so I propose to keep it to myself."

"Some shadow in your past career, that makes it necessary, I presume?"

"I presume not, sir!" Sandy retorted tartly.

"Oh! pray don't take offense. I meant nothing. It seemed so strange, to me, you know. Let me see; you've been with us three weeks."

"I have."

"And have given Mr. Lyons the greatest of satisfaction, I understand, with but one exception."

"Ah! I was not aware of my not having done everything entirely right."

"Well, to tell the truth, you have so far as the overseership is concerned. But you see it's this way. My step-uncle, Mr. Lyons, is a very rich man, and a very sensitive one. It has come to his ears that you have formed the acquaintance

of his daughter, during his absence, and as he had based great hopes on her future, he is grievously pained that there should have unfortunately been several meetings between you and Miss Laurel."

"Indeed! How, unfortunate?"

Sandy had flushed somewhat, and his eyes flashed with a spirit he could not control.

"Unfortunate, as you must know, because your stations in life are so at variance. You are a man who depends upon the sweat of your brow for sustenance, while she is a young lady of wealth and culture."

"I fail to see, sir, how you know that I am beneath her social position. You, nor any other person in Ghoul Gulch, have any data as to who I am, what I am worth or what are my connections with matters worldly."

"Maybe not. That is not for me to say. I know you to be a nice-appearing fellow. I speak only in the interests of my relative, Mr. Lyons."

"Did he commission you to do this?"

"He did."

"He must have received information from you, then?"

"He did. I felt it my duty to write him. Laurel is but a child yet."

"You have made yourself decidedly fresh, sir, I assure you. Will you show me your instructions?"

"I haven't them with me—left the letter on my bureau."

"Perhaps, then, you can give me some idea as to whom Mr. Lyons designs to marry his daughter?"

"I flatter myself I can, that!" and Hawk rubbed his hands and smiled. "The gentleman could wear my wardrobe, and it wouldn't be a misfit."

"I thought as much. Very likely Mr. Lyons can satisfactorily explain the matter on his return!"

"What! dare you insinuate that he did not write such a letter, you—"

"Have a care how you address me, Harry Hawk. I'll have you know I'm not a man to be insulted with impunity."

"You have insulted me, sir! I'll have satisfaction for this!" Hawk cried aloud, his passion aroused, and leaping to his feet he drew a revolver.

Before he could hope to use it, it was knocked from his hand.

"Enough of this, Mr. Hawk. You nor any other man can fight in my place!"

It was Madam Midnight who spoke.

She stood in their presence, her handsome form looking queenly.

Hawk instantly cowered, and leaving his weapon lying on the floor, reseated himself.

Sandy arose.

"It's a matter of slight importance, madam," he said, doffing his hat, "and you are right—this is no place to settle a personal matter. If Mr. Hawk wants *satisfaction* he can send notice by his second any time. I have neither inclination to fight nor to refuse to fight!"

A game of faro was just starting, and the pot war heavy.

Sandy strolled up, noted the piles, and drop-

ped a hundred-dollar note on the queen of diamonds.

"A hundred to one I win!" he said.

"Five hundred even you don't!" Hawk gritted, pulling forth a bundle of money.

"Take you!" from Sandy.

The bet was made; Carlos de Castra held the stakes.

The cards were then drawn.

Sandy won.

A murmur from around the table, while Hawk looked annoyed and vengeful.

"I'm broke!" Hawk confessed. "Is my check good till Lyons gets back?"

"Perfectly."

The game was much lighter this time; nevertheless, Sandy made another scoop.

He was upwards of twelve hundred dollars in.

"That will do for me!" he announced.

"Crawfish!" Hawk sneered.

"Liar!" was the hot retort.

The superintendent leaped to his feet with a terrible oath.

"I'll make you choke that back, curse you," he yelled. "Come out into the street, if you are not afraid."

"Lead ahead," was Sandy's order. "We might as well settle the matter now as at any other time."

Hawk obeyed, uttering a string of bitter imprecations as he went.

Sandy followed close behind him, no trace of fear upon his handsome face.

Outside a moon nearly full poured down a mellow flood of light upon the town, illuminating all objects with startling distinctness.

In addition to the crowd already upon the wide, rough thoroughfare, the Mabille was soon emptied of its *habitués*, and the greatest excitement soon prevailed.

The opponents took to the center of the street, which was left clear for them, for no Westerner of much experience is fond of stopping the bullets of a street duel, where the spectator is full as liable to get "salivated" as the duelists.

"What weapons do you propose to use?" Sandy demanded, when they were facing each other.

"Revolvers, curse you, or knives. I'm not particular, because I'll make a case for a coyote feast, anyhow."

"Revolvers, then, let it be. Choose your seconds, and I will mine, and they shall put the tools in order."

"Who will act for me?" Hawk cried, looking around. "I want a second."

"I'm yer man," cried a low-browed fellow, with bandy legs and an eye that some one had recently frescoed in raven color. "It's a cold day when I don't load yer poppers kerect fer ye, Harry."

"And I will act fer the other gent!" a long-geared, meek-looking, smooth-faced man said, towering forward, fully six feet and a quarter in height. "I'm Steamboat Steve, from the Mississip, an' a stranger hyerabouts—but that don't matter, fer I'm as square as a cube. All right, pardner?"

"You'll do," Sandy replied. "Who will act as referee, now?"

No one replied. It was not a job that the

ordinary pilgrim coveted, for an unsatisfactory decision to either party was liable to entail a free fight in such a multitude as surged impatiently at either side of the street.

"Come, gents; a referee is an imperative necessity here. Who will oblige?"

"Ker-whoop! Hurray! Whar'm I wanted? Make room—breathin' space fer the great chaw'-em-up of Chico—ther untamed flowin' fly from Vultureville. I'm yer man—Monkey Mouth, the biggest storm o' blood an' butcher-knives this side o' anywhere. Bow-wow! ba-a-a! who sed obleege?"

Down the street, tearing along with panther-like leaps, had come a gigantic specimen of the summer race, with roars and yells, until he was forced to pause and gasp for breath; then he glared around at the assemblage as if he would like to swallow them one by one.

Hatless and bootless, and clad only in a suit of tattered, greasy overalls he possessed, in addition to his huge limbs and trunk, a monstrous head, minus many visible patches of hair, and a terribly cut face of positively wolfish expression, the mouth of which stretched open nearly from ear to ear, and disclosed an expanse of large gleaming teeth, with here and there a vacancy where he had lost one.

As a whole, he was a hideous object to gaze upon and a murmur of surprise was audible.

"Oh! ye kin luk at me! I know I ain't purty. I war ther chromo o' ther Nor'west, a week ago, but I went on ther rampage, an' got licked like thunder. Who wants a second? Squeal!"

"We do," spoke up Sandy.

"Bow-wow! ba-a-a! I'm yer howlin' old bull-calf, then. My handle is Monkey Mouth, the chaw'-em up, an' I'm every bit as good as I look. Get ter yer persitions! I'm yer bloomin' dandelion fer the squar' deal every time, an' don't ye two forget it!"

CHAPTER III.

AN EXTRA SHOT.

"HURRAY! that's the ticket—let'er go!" cried Kit, the Denver Sport, who had by this time arrived on the scene. "I've got a lone dollar w'ot sez that Sandy gits erway wi' Hawky in four rounds. Oh but ain't this a pic-nic tho'!"

"Jest ye keep yer gab outer, or I'll chaw ye up an' spit ye out!" Monkey Mouth growled, so ferociously that Kit involuntarily edged away.

"Thet feller looks like he might be able to swaller a porkypine, quills and all," he observed to a miner. "Guess his old woman was jealous of his beauty an' got up an' lambasted him. Sech is life. Who d'ye bet on, pard?"

"Looks like Sandy will give Hawk more than he bargained for—that is, if he's as good wi' the shooter as he aire wi' other things."

"You pile yer rhino on him every time."

"I'll 'zamine them pops, ef ye please, beloved seconds!" Monkey Mouth declared. "I want to see that thar ain't no 'possum bizness in this hyar funeral!"

"That's right!" Sandy agreed. "Let it be seen that each weapon contains all the cartridges it will hold!"

The weapons were made ready by the seconds

and then handed over to Monkey Mouth, who, after a minute's inspection delivered them up to the two principals.

"Put yer backs to each other!" sung out the referee; "then each take ten paces for'a'd. Then, when I squeal out 'Keno!' wheel about and blaze away, one shot each. When I squeal 'Keno!' each time, let her flicker. When ye git enuff, let us know!"

They took their positions, these too men who were to fight each other, and marched forward ten paces and paused, their weapons held in readiness to wheel about and fire at the given word.

"Ready, gents?" sung out the giant.

"Ready!" responded Sandy.

"Ditto," echoed Hawk.

"Then the devil take ther poorest shooter, an' some one pass around ther hat, an' take up a kerlection fer funeral expenses. *Keno!*"

The report of the weapons rung forth upon the clear night air.

A howl of pain from Hawk.

His left wrist was shattered, and there was a bullet wound in his cheek.

"Foul play!" he shrieked. "I have been shot twice!"

In an instant all was excitement of the most intense character, as the crowd surged around.

Hawk had fallen to the ground, and the seconds were examining his wounds.

"The cursed feller did it!" the superintendent roared. "Somebody salivate him for me."

"You are wrong," Sandy protested, he having drawn near. "I fired but one shot, as the cartridges in my revolver will prove," and he handed the still smoking weapon over to Monkey Mouth.

"The chap tells the straight," the giant declared. "Thar's been but one bullet fired from this pop!"

"Yet Mr. Hawk has undoubtedly been hit twice," Steamboat Steve spoke up, from his kneeling position. "Here is a bullet imbedded in Hawk's left wrist, and a bullet has also grazed his right cheek with force enough to draw blood. Some one certainly fired a second shot, or else the single bullet struck his cheek first, and glanced down and shattered his wrist."

The idea aroused the risibilities of the rough audience, and they broke into a roar of laughter.

It did not please Harry Hawk, however, for he uttered a string of curses.

"Take me in the hotel!" he roared, "and get a doctor. I'll yet live to be revenged for this night's work!"

His request was granted; several pairs of willing hands volunteered.

After he had disappeared within the hotel, and the majority of the crowd still lingered in the street, Sandy entered the Mabille, and spied Madam Midnight looking out of an open window.

She evidently did not see him, until he touched her lightly on the shoulder, when she turned with a little gasp of alarm.

"Oh! it's only I!" Sandy laughed. "I wonder how many know who fired that extra shot?"

"I don't know!" she replied, in a strange tone of voice. "Do you?"

"I should say I do!"

She gazed at him a moment, in a way that made him feel uneasy.

"Who did fire it?" she demanded, in the same constrained voice.

"You did!" he replied, candidly.

A faint, sarcastic laugh escaped her lips, and she turned and swept away from him.

Saudy gazed after her, half regretfully.

"Strange! strange!" he mused. "She is a mystery, and she knows it, and means to remain so. And I—I have resolved to penetrate her disguise, let come what may. Why is it that she is ever connected with my thoughts? I sometimes fancy—"

What he fancied, was not to be known, for he abruptly turned and left the Mabille.

The Denver Sport was in a quandary. He had already fallen in love with the camp of Ghoul Gulch, for he was in the seventh heaven of delight where there was any fun or excitement to be had.

And he wanted to remain; but, how was he to do it! He had been promised work, yet he required a pick, shovel, pan, and pouch, and had not the wherewithal to purchase them. How, then, was he to become possessed of the important tools?

It was not probable that he could buy them on credit; it was not likely that he could borrow what he wanted, and as for stealing, that was out of the question.

The prospects looked dubious.

"It's a durned shame that a feller o' my Denver wit can't see a way out o' this dilemmer," he mused, as he sauntered along with the crowd after the duel was over. "Thar's whar many a feller kin never mount to shucks, 'case he ain't got any graft to start on. 'Tain't goin' ter stunt my financial growth, though—not fer Mary. I've got ther requisite gall, an' all I want aire ther perquisite—ther hard doubloons. Thar's old Dutchy—I noticed he had a number of outfits fer sale. Ef I could only strike a dicker wi' him. Reckon thar's no use o' bein' afeard o' tryin', anyhow."

His stroll soon brought him to the restaurant of Hans Glockenspiel. The only person present besides the Teuton was a red-faced man with bushy beard and a cherry-red nose, who was leaning against the bar.

"Vell, v'ot you vants now?" Hans growled, as he spied his tormentor of a few hours before.

"Oh! nothin' much. Jest dropped in ter let ye kno' I've struck a job an' kin now afford to masticate two square meals a day at your caravansary," Kit replied, loftily.

"Dat ish good. V'ot vill you haff?"

"Ten dollars out of the till. I never drink. But, lookee here, Dutchy. If you want ther honor o' caterin' ter my custom, you must do me a favor."

"Nix. I favors nopoly. Von mans vas yoost so goot as anodder, v'en he haff der tin."

"Oh! but look yer'. How much will you sell one of them outfits for?"

"Fife tollar. Dey vas cost me ten."

"What a whopper! Now, lookee yer'. 'Fore

I kin go to work, I wants one of them aire outfits. I'll go wi'out breakfast an' give ye a dollar on one of them—every red I've got. Then, when I git paid, I'll give you the remainder."

"Shimminy gracious! v'ot you dakes me for? You d'inks I vas a fool?"

"Nary a time. You are the smartest-lookin' chap I've met in a dog's age. Why, I've heard President Arthur speak of how liberal an' accommodatin' Hans Glockenspiel was."

"Taffy! Nix! I sells for cash."

"Ye won't trust me then?"

"Not off der court vas 'quainted mit hisself."

"All right. That's one I owe you. Just wait an' see how I'll git even wi' you."

"V'ot you mean?"

"You won't know till all at once. I'll make you wish you was a canary-bird, durned ef I don't!"

"See hyer, boy, what d'ye want of an outfit?" the red-faced man asked.

"To go to work in the diggin's with. Got ther job already."

"S'pose you want ther tools ter-night, hey?"

"You hit it."

"Well, you look like a smart 'un, an' I kin gi'n ye a lift. I know whar's a purty set o' tools w'ot no one don't use. Feller as owned 'em passed in his checks t'other night."

"Then, spit her out, an' I'll gobble onter 'em, quicker than Christmas!"

"Will ye, tho'? Neow, you're kinder clever, too. S'posin' ye wouldn't give yer dollar fer 'em?"

"Yas, I'll do that, perwidin' thar's no skin game?"

"O' course not. Do I look like a feller as would fabricate? My name's Sol Shyster, as Hans kin tell ye, here."

"Dot vos all square!" Hans assented.

"Then spiel out, and the stuff is yourn."

"The dollar first. I aire allus mistrustful o' kids."

Kit considered a moment. Might he not as well run his chances, as to lay out of work?

"Here's the dollar. Now let's heer from you."

"Waal, boyee, you foller up the gulch till ye cum to a dark, narrow ravine, right-hand side, 'bout three miles from here. Pick yer way up the ravine, till ye cum to a big cedar tree. Climb this, an' in the crotch you'll find the tools, an' no mistake. Ef ye don't I'll give ye back yer dollar."

"That's fair. Well, here goes!"

The young sport from Denver left the restaurant and trudged away hopefully, rather enjoying the moonlight night.

Although already footsore, he did not mind the rough tramp, so absorbed was he with the prospect of getting the work-tools. Being a rapid walker, he covered the distance of three miles in a short time, and found himself at the mouth of the ravine, which was nothing more or less than a deep black seam that rent two mountain walls asunder.

The moonlight penetrated but a few yards into it—beyond the grimest darkness prevailed.

"Gosh all fish-hooks! Looks like there might be spooks in there!" Kit commented, pausing to take in the lonely surroundings. "Spooks or no spooks, here goes!"

He boldly entered the fissure, which in places was barely wide enough to admit the passage of a pack-horse. All the way along a shallow stream of water ran over the rough bottom. After a full mile was passed over, the rift struck a transverse seam, while the main passage gradually began to widen, and in a short time Kit came to a big cedar tree.

"I reckon this is my hardware store," he muttered, looking carefully around, half-suspecting that he had been led unwittingly into some trap; but everything seemed quiet and harmless.

The hoot of an owl was heard further up the ravine, which sounded dismal enough to the adventurous boy.

The tree was an unusually large one with low growing branches, and was crotched about ten feet from the ground.

Kit knew he could climb it easily enough, but had no means of knowing whether it would be worth his while, for he could not see up in the crotch.

"Ef that sardine has fooled me, I'll eat my shirt if I don't git square with him!" he muttered. "I fancy he's a cut-and-dried rascal, and I'll venture that the Dutchy ain't fur behind him. But I'll shin up and find the tools, if they are there."

Without much trouble he succeeded in drawing himself up among the thickest of the branches, and readily reached the crotch.

Sure enough, the tools were there, in a large canvas sack—a shovel, pick-ax, pan, pouch, and besides these, a bowie-knife, loaded revolver, and a snuff-box.

"Struck luck, by Jinks!" Kit muttered. "I'll jest rest here and examine my treasure."

"All but money," he soliloquized, as he finished the inspection. "These are purty new tools, too. The pop an' the pricker will jest fix me out like a reg'lar miner. Woe be to his giblets who treads on my corns now."

He sat a few minutes to rest.

The owl still hooted in the distance.

The breeze wafted along that peculiar odor which indicates the approach of a summer thunder-storm.

"Guess I might as well be joggin' along back," Kit muttered. "'Twon't be many hours till daybreak now. Wonder ef that Harry Hawk won't accuse me o' stealin' this lot o' fixin's? It would be just like him. 'Spect like enough Sandy will get bounced fer givin' Hawky the salivatin'. Quare lot o' people they aire in Ghoul Gulch."

He was about to descend from the tree with his prize, when he fancied he heard voices, so he resumed his seat, his heart beating fast with expectation.

"Wonder ef I ain't got myself into a hornets' nest?" the boy from Denver mused, as he listened.

Ha! There it was again!

It could not be the murmur of the wind.

It was two persons in conversation.

A couple of moments of suspense—then the voices again.

"They're comin' this way from further up the gulch. Bet a chew ov spruce-gum they're

outlaws, or somethin' o' the sort, and I'm a corpus within the jerk of a snake's tongue."

Footsteps were now audible, and two men soon came to a halt beneath the branches of the cedar tree!

Each carried a lighted lantern, and Kit was enabled to make out that they were enveloped in dark cloaks, slouched hats and black masks.

They had scarcely halted, when a man came from the direction of Ghoul Gulch, and joined them. He, too, was equipped like the others; and Kit anxiously awaited developments.

CHAPTER IV.

SANDY GETS A HUG.

THE man who came from the direction of Ghoul Gulch, was of about medium stature, while the other two were strapping big fellows.

"Well, captain, how's things, now?" one of these latter asked, leaning against the tree, idly. "Anything stirring?"

"Rest assured on that score, or I wouldn't be here," the other responded, chuckling as he spoke.

"Then, out with it, for we're as dull and lazy as gluttoned buzzards, wi' hevin' nothin' to do."

"Didn't ye tackle that case I warned ye of, then?"

"Waal, we should articulate not! There was nothin' in it, 'cept a pair o' nooses for a pair of galoots of about our size!"

"You were sensible, then. I suppose you are prepared to go in toes, fingers, nails an' tooth-picks, for a job that will pan out big results?"

"We? Now don't talk! Ef ye put us straddle of a lead, ef we don't make it hum, our name's not Jack an' Jill!"

"Well, Jack, I can put you on a lead, that will pan out better than anything we've tackled yet. You know I told you that Jim Lyons had gone to Chicago?"

"Yas."

"Well, he's comin' back, an' will reach Ghoul Gulch, by stage, about ten o'clock, to-morrow night."

"Ye don't say!"

"But I do, you know."

"Does he bring back a fat pocket-book?"

"If he don't it's queer. He took ten thousand in bullion with him, and is going to fetch it back in paper."

"Then he's our mutton!"

"Of course. That ain't all the prize. He gobbled onto a wife in Chicago!"

"Durn the wimmen! What of her?"

"Wait till ye hear. This particular piece o' petticoat aire a rich 'un, an' I've larned she wears suthin' like ten thousan' dollars' worth o' diamonds."

"Wuss an' wuss!"

"Better an' better, I should calculate!" Jill gurgled. "That's our pot, as sure as thar's feathers on a shanghai's foot. We orter make a haul as would fix us up in bizness for a long time to come."

"Better than that."

"But say, ain't it rather risky to 'tack the hearse light-handed?"

"I reckon we're enuff for it. The night-stage never comes in with more'n two or three

passengers. However, I'll find out beforehand. The stage gits to Pineville about five P. M. So I'll telegraph there about that time, and find out how many passengers the shebang has got aboard."

"Look out it don't rouse 'spicion!"

"Leave that to me. If ye war as old as I am in the bizness, ye'd not trouble yerself a away. I never was nabbed yet, in all my years of roguery!"

"That ain't sayin' you mayn't be yet. But, capt'in, where are we ter 'tack ther hearse?"

"Five miles out, where the stage abruptly rounds the Indian Nose rocks. It's a capital place. It reaches there at eight o'clock always, unless for some accident. You be there on time!"

"Wull you be thar?"

"Unless something turns up, more than I know for, at present."

"It would be risky 'tackin' it alone."

"Nonsense. You've done it before now. Be there, without fail, well heeled, and don't let it get away from you."

"Keerect, boss! We're to have a ekal divvy, hey?"

"Of course. Get back now!"

Then, turning, the captain strode swiftly in the direction of Ghoul Gulch, while the other two took up their lanterns and made off in the opposite direction.

Kit had been listening with all ears. He comprehended, acutely enough, that those below him were professional road-agents, and their daring plot for robbing Mr. and Mrs. James Lyons had inspired him with more than ordinary interest.

Perhaps it was because he was about to enter the employ of Mr. Lyons—perhaps it was because he recognized—or thought he did—the voice of one of the two—the voice of Jack—the one who had conversed the most with the captain.

"If I'm off my base, I hope I'll be put out of the club," he muttered, after they were gone, using a base-ball phrase to express his sentiments. "I am getting decidedly interested in the ker-acters that Ghoul Gulch pans out. But, there's work, to-morrow, and to-morrow night, and I'll be jiggered if I don't need sleep. So I'll shuffle off for camp, an' sleep on the soft side of a sod, till dawn."

Descending from the tree he hurried back to the mining-camp, sought out a corner where he was not liable to be disturbed, and was not long in dropping off into a sound sleep.

When the six-o'clock whistle blowed, however, he was at the office of the Lyons Mining Concern, and found Harry Hawk busy dispatching the men to work.

Kit came last in the line, and the superintendent glared at him in a way that would have abashed any ordinary lad; but the Denver Sport was cheek-proof to scare, and nodded as familiarly as though he had known his boss for years.

"Good-morning, Mr. Hawk! Dash me, but I'm glad to see you looking so well, after last night. 'Twere a downright shame fer ye to git it so rough. I'd 'a' bet on you, fer my pile, you looked so sure. Hope you won't be laid up long?"

The boy's apparently candid sympathy took Hawk by surprise.

"I guess not, boy," he said, pleasantly. "That man Sandy—do you like him?"

"He's a son-of-a-gun. I've got a grudge maturing ag'in' him. I'm watching him like a weasel."

"Good. That's what I want. Mind! if you can catch him—or implicate him, do you understand—in any crooked action, your fortune is made!"

"Kerect! I savy! But, where am I to sling my muscle to-day?"

"I'll put you under Sandy. Watch him like a ferret. Will you do it?"

"If I don't, I'll chaw my own ear."

"Good! Be off now. As long as I see you are working for my interests against—you know—I'll give you seven a day. That's three above the others."

"I'm your mutton then," Kit declared, dancing away.

When out of earshot, he chuckled softly, to himself:

"I ain't so green as I look, mebbe. Ef that Harry Hawk ain't jest a prime old piece of willainy, I don't want no grub fer a month. Wants ter make me his stool-pigeon too, to work out some mean revenge on Sandy. Seven dollars! Wow-o! that's a figger, but et can't tech me. I'll jest pertend ter be in wi' Hawky an' scoop the collateral, while in reality I'll not let harm come to Sandy. I can't fergit that it was his loose cash what got my stomik on speaking terms wi' beef an' pertaters, on my arrival heer. He's a prime gud feller, but I'll bet thar's trouble in store for him."

At the diggings he found Sandy setting his men to work at the placer claim.

Still another gang of men had already gone to work in the drift that had been tunneled into one side of the mountain.

"Hello! what's this?" Sandy exclaimed, as he saw Kit. "You look as if you meant business."

"Bet I do, old stockings! Had orders to render my elbow-grease under yonr direction, and heer I am."

"Who sent you?"

"The feller what you salivated — Harry Hawk."

"That's strange. He's hardly the man to show any one a favor, especially a boy."

"Oh, the gal did it—yer gal—Miss Laurel. She coaxed him a bit, and he wilted like a frost-bitten cabbage."

"Oh, that's the way of it, eh? Well, get to work, and let's see what you can do."

Kit did get to work with a will, and literally "hoed his own row" with the biggest of the miners, until the noon whistle blew.

He then sat down upon a boulder, and rather wistfully watched the miners trudge off to their meals.

"Come, Kit, are you not going to your dinner?" Sandy asked, as he was about to depart for his own repast.

"Nix!" the boy replied. "Hev ter wait till pay-day for my grub."

"Nonsense. You trot along up to the Grand Union, fill yer bread-basket to your satisfaction,

and tell the clerk who sent you. It will be all right."

"Much obleege to you, sir. I'll not fergit yer kindness," and, greatly elated at his good fortune, Kit skurried away.

"Where are you now, seven per-day?" and he laughed as he talked. "Ef ye was a ten ye couldn't tempt me ter go back on Sandy."

He took particular pains to pass Hans Glockenspiel's place, and found the Dutchman standing in the doorway.

"Hello, poy! how you vas?" he saluted. "Dinner vas all ready by der inside."

"Ye don't say so, Dutchy! Well, you just go right in and git outside of it yourself. I'm stopping at the Grand Union. No more second-class grub for yours truly!"

And he strutted on with the pomposity of a lord-mayor.

The Grand Union was a large frame building with plenty of room, and was as nearly a first-class hotel as could be found in the mining-regions. The dining-room was large and liberally furnished, and the meals were bountiful and the dishes varied.

Kit entered with several other miners, and was served with courtesy he little expected, considering his dilapidated appearance, and the way he put down the victuals was astonishing to the waiters.

"Ef I'm ter sojourn at this caravansary, I'll hev to invest in some better togs," he mentally soliloquized. "This ain't no half-shell place."

After dinner he went to the office and mentioned who had sent him.

"That's all right," the clerk said, suavely. "Call again."

"Reckon mebbe I will; as soon as my finances aggregate sufficiently, I 'spect to stop here reg'-lar," he announced.

On the way back to the diggings he met Harry Hawk, both of whose arms were in a sling, while a patch of court-plaster ornamented his cheek.

"Well, boy, how d'ye like it?" he demanded, surveying Kit keenly.

"Bully! Feel as if I could knock out a locomotive already. Thet aire Sandy are a grouty overseer, tho'!"

"You'll soon get him down. By the way, I'd forgotten you had no money. Step into the office, here, and Simmons will pay you for today's work."

Kit obeyed, and then betook himself to the diggings, as he observed:

"Hawky is nice as goose-egg om'let. Thinks he's caught onto a reg'lar softy. Too bad to collar his shekels an' deceive him, both—but, he orter know better'n ter pick up a Denver boy fer a flat."

On arrival at the claim, he found no one there but Sandy. It was not yet one o'clock, and the miners were lingering about the saloon.

The overseer was seated upon a rock, evidently engaged in deep thought.

"How much per ounce fer yer thoughts?" Kit asked, cheerily.

"Not much. I was day-dreaming."

"Bout the boss's gal, hey? Don't blame you. She's sweeter nor a cocoanut pie, she is, Thinks a heap o' you, too, I reckon."

"Nonsense. We have known each other but a few days, and are scarcely on terms of intimacy."

"Git out! Can't close my lookers. By the way, the old gent is comin' back to-night!"

Sandy gave a start, while a peculiar expression came over his handsome face.

"How do you know this?" he asked, eying Kit sharply.

"What war ears made fur but to hear?"

"Who did you hear say so?"

"That's my biz. I never gives away 'portant secrets. Give ye one p'inter, tho'. The guv'nor aire fetchin' back a bride."

"I suspected something of the kind. Hawk has been confiding to you."

"Like Patsy Bolliver went to Congress. That close-mouthed rogue hev got too much sense."

"Perhaps."

"While we're alone, I want ter give ye another p'inter," Kit added, mysteriously. "Hev ye got your life insured?"

"Ha, ha! I fancy not."

"Well, ye better git it. Ye'r liable to see trouble afore many moons."

"Maybe! What makes you think so?"

"Case that Harry Hawk is watchin' fer a sly chance to git squar' wi' ye. He has picked me up as a reg'lar sponge-headed softy, an' sent me heer ter watch yer fer some action that will impeach yer korrecter."

"Indeed! This is news; tho' he is villain enough to do anything!"

"Bet he is! Reg'lar thoroughbred rogue. I get extra wages fer pipin' you—seveng per diem. How's that fer clam-bake?"

"I suppose you are taking it?"

"Wouldn't I orter be kicked ef I didn't? Just bet I'm scoopin' in sech snaps."

"Well, how have you made out for him—caught me in any criminal action?"

"Nary act! D'ye take me fer a mean, dirty nincompoop of a slouch? Ef ye do, ye're off yer narrow-gage. Ef I go back on you, I hope I may be ground up an' stuffed into red-hot bologna to be masticated by Dutchmen! When a feller does me a good turn, my name ain't Christopher Bricktop ef I don't stick tighter tew him than perfume tew a pole-cat!"

Sandy smiled at the boy's apparent earnestness.

"Well, I'm glad I've got one friend," he said. His tone would have seemed to imply that he had but few. "A true friend is more valuable than gold."

"I orter know that," Kit replied. "But, I say, old stockin's, ain't thar some obstacle ter ye makin' headway up thar?" and he nodded toward the Lyons residence.

"Perhaps. Why do you ask?"

"Ca'se I kinder dropped onto the idea. She's rich, ye know—leastwise her daddy is—an' you're nothin' but a laborin' chap, like me, fer instance. I know suthin' bout it myself. Got mashed on a purty Chinese gal up in Denver, whose daddy war rich; but 'ca'se I wouldn't let some one flatten my bazzoo, an' wear my shirt outside of my breeches, the parent said no."

"Your tongue will run away with you some day, boy."

"Not if the court knows herself, and she ruther opine she do. But, lookee here, Sandy, I'm a kid, yet I fancy I know a few p'ints. Ef ye war well-fixed in every respect, ye'd sail in fer Miss Laurel fer all ye was worth."

"If I had wealth—although I am not exactly a poor man—and good social position, it is true it might be different. I keenly feel the difference in our spheres in life; the more so since Hawk kindly reminded me of the fact last night."

"Don't you take no stock in *him*. He's after the same chicken you are. Jest ye listen an' I'll tell ye how to git yer work in on the old man. Jest smooth *his* pin-feathers an' the gal's yourn."

Sandy could not help taking an interest in what Kit said. The young vagabond's words were so often filled with good sense that the handsome miner was growing to like him.

"Go ahead, Kit. We've but a few minutes more, so be brief with your discourse."

"Well, as I war sayin', ef ye git yer work in on the old man your stock's 'way up. I'll tell ye how ter do it. D'ye know whar ther Injun Nose is?"

"About four or five miles to the south, along the stage trail."

"Kerecct. Well, ther stage, at night, gits to that place about eight o'clock?"

"Yes."

"Ter-night at eight it will be stopped at that point by road-agents, and the guv'ner an' his lovey-dovey will be robbed o' their ducats and other walubables."

"The deuce you say! How do you know this, boy?"

"I overheard the plot last night 'twixt three masked men—I reckon ye call 'em road-agents out here."

Kit then related the circumstances of his trip to the lone ravine in full.

"By heavens! this is an outrage, and we must balk their little game."

"Bet yer ace-flush on that! See the p'int? You an' me gits ahead o' road-agents an' gives warnin' to ther stage, an' we'll give the robbers fits. The guv'ner will be so elated that he'll count us as reg'lar out an' out heroes, an' that's how you'll git inter the good graces of his giblets."

Sandy smiled faintly.

"I'm of the opinion we wouldn't be so greatly lionized as all that, Kit. James Lyons is not the man to idolize a person for doing him a favor. He would be more likely to hand us an X apiece and thank us in a polite way, which would give us to understand that he did not consider himself under any further obligations to us. However, it is our duty to act, no matter about the consequences. Keep this matter to yourself and I will see you after six."

The whistle at the quartz mill blew just then, and the men came trudging back to their work.

Kit did his full share of labor with the others, and seemed to rather enjoy his new occupation.

The afternoon, however, seemed to drag slowly to him. His mind was full of their impending nocturnal journey.

It was about mid-afternoon, when Kit spied

something that set him agog with excitement, and brought a broad grin to his face.

Sandy was idly leaning against his accustomed boulder, watching his men, his back turned toward the Lyons mansion.

Tripping along from the same direction, came Miss Angelina Lyons, elegantly attired, and looking like a school-girl at a distance.

"Now for it!" Kit muttered, feeling like rolling on the ground and yelling. "If an explanation follows, and I'm exposed, won't Sandy give it to me, tho'!"

He managed to change his position so that his back was turned to the overseer, for fear Sandy would observe the expression of merriment upon his face.

Nearer and nearer approached Miss Angelina, her movements stealthy and catlike. It looked as if she was desirous of taking the overseer by surprise.

Sandy, mentally absorbed in one of his day-dreams, was oblivious of everything except his thoughts, and his watch of the laborers; consequently the surprise to him was complete.

Miss Angelina reached the back of the boulder, and throwing her arms about his neck, twisted him around, and kissed him repeatedly upon the cheek.

The cry of astonishment that Sandy uttered attracted the attention of the miners, and all hands looked around in time to take in the last kiss of the exceedingly dramatic scene.

A roar of laughter was the result!

Sandy grew as red as a beet, while Miss Angelina's hug about his neck was evidently there to stay.

Unable longer to control himself, Kit lay upon the ground, convulsed with laughter.

"Let loose, woman! Blame it, what do you mean?" Sandy at length cried in hot anger; and breaking from her embrace he held her away at arm's length.

"Oh! Sandy!" she cried, reproachfully, "how cruel you are! My heart is nearly broken."

"My dear woman, consider yourself lucky that your neck isn't broken!" the astounded overseer cried, white with anger and mortification. "For Heaven's sake, Miss Lyons, what is the meaning of this ridiculous scene?"

"Why—why, Sandy, I didn't know I was doing you any harm. See, love, I have your little red rose, as fresh as when plucked, over my heart—"

"What red rose? Confound it. I—I—"

Sandy was too excited for utterance, conscious, the while, that the miners were taking in the scene, with immense delight.

"Didn't you send it, Sandy?—didn't you send it as a souvenir of your love for your dear Angeline?"

"Oh! Lord preserve us!" groaned Sandy. "Oh! Heaven, what does she mean? Red rose—souvenir of love—confound it, woman, you're crazy! I never sent you so much as an atom of anything."

"You did! you did, base deceiver! The young gentleman said so. He brought me your declaration of love—he came to break the ice between us!"

"Break the ice between us?" and Sandy was

used up. The sweat rolled down his cheeks, and he would have been overjoyed had the earth opened up and swallowed him.

"What fellow?" he continued. "Who was he? How did he look? Show him to me! I'll murder him!"

"I—I forget!" Angelina faltered, faintly. "So great was the ecstasy of my joy, that I have entirely forgotten him."

"Oh! cracky! what a relief!" thought the young Sport. "Hope to gracious her memory continues bad. Sandy would annihilate me if he found out 'twas me as engineered the circus."

"You are evidently laboring under a fit of mental derangement, madam," Sandy declared trying to control himself.

"'Tis false. I know what I'm about, and you can't put me off with such pretenses. You've won my affection, and then publicly trampled on it. Oh! sir-rh, you shall pay dearly for this! Every one shall know of your base perfidy, and I'll have legal redress in the bargain!" and, shaking her fist fairly under his nose, with unmistakable wrath, she turned and hurried away.

"Go to work, you fools!" Sandy roared to the miners, "before I shoot some of you. The crazy creature has clear knocked the breath out of me. What possessed her to assail me in that style, beats my time. I've a notion—"

"So have I!" snorted Kit, endeavoring to control his merriment. "I'll bet the broken bones of an old orang-outang, that Hawky has been puttin' a job up, on you, ter pay fer his last night's lunch."

"If I thought he had—"

Sandy did not finish the sentence, but the expression of his face spoke better than words, that if such were the case, Mr. Hawk had better look out for himself.

The men went to work, and the remainder of the afternoon passed without incident.

Sandy kept his usual position, but his face was clouded, and he was plainly in no pleasant humor.

"Look out fer another moonlight fracas, ter night!" Kit mused, as he worked away. "I kinder wish I hadn't done that thing. Hereafter, shoot me ef I don't fight shy of old maids."

However, when quitting time came, Sandy did not go near the office, but straightway sought his own rough shanty.

This was a relief to Kit, and he went to supper, with an easier mind.

After supper, he sallied forth, to purchase some cartridges, a cheap flannel shirt, a pair of pants, and a serviceable pair of boots, which nearly exhausted his day's wages.

"To-morrow I'll try and scoop in a better article of head-gear," he muttered, as he betook himself toward Sandy's shanty. "Dunno whether I'll find Sandy in humor for our trip, to-night or not. He had the genuine sky blues the wust kind, this afternoon."

Naturally light-footed he approached the overseer's humble abode without much noise. The shanty was somewhat isolated from the other habitations, by the handsome fellow's choice, for he was naturally of a retiring disposition, seldom courting the society of any one,

As the boy drew near the shanty, he fancied he heard voices.

"Mebbe he has got wisitors, an' my presence would be obnoxious. I'll not interdooce myself at present, but I would like ter know who his visitor is," he muttered; and after a brief pause he stole nearer. As he did so, the voices became plainer.

It was a cloudy night; the moon only showing itself at intervals; so he readily obtained a position where he could see and hear without danger of being noticed.

Sandy stood near the door, leaning against a tree. In front of him was the figure of a woman—a graceful-looking person, too.

Kit had as keen a pair of eyes as any one well could have, and he leveled them at the female searchingly.

"Bet a pint o' cider it's the guv'nor's gal, Miss Laurel," he muttered.

The sound of her voice a moment later corroborated his opinion.

It was indeed Laurel!

"Now fer sugar an' 'lasses!" chuckled the irrepressible Denver Sport.

CHAPTER V.

A BUSY NIGHT FOR SANDY.

"SANDY, what have I done—what have I said, that you treat me so differently?" Laurel's voice demanded. "Why are you so cold—so different from your usual self? Something must have occurred to bring this change?"

"It might as well be explained now as at any other time," he said. "I was fascinated by your dear face and charming manners, and sought your acquaintance, blind to the fact of the strong contrasts in our respective positions in life. Indeed, I did not pause to consider until spurred to do so by the information that your respected father urgently requested that our intimacy should immediately end."

"Oh, Sandy, this is not true! I know papa did not say that."

"I was informed that he did, and when I came to consider that I am but a poor working-man, and you a beautiful, cultured young lady of wealth and position, I cannot doubt but that it was your father's edict. Naturally, he must have loftier aspirations for your future."

"Hush! hush, Sandy! Don't let this trouble you in the least, love. Who told you that my papa made such an absurd remark?"

"Harry Hawk."

"I thought so. You can rest assured that there is not a word of truth in it. He is a bad man."

"Yet aspires to your hand, and his suit is sanctioned by your father."

"By no means. Father never once mentioned such a thing to me, and Harry Hawk is well aware that I heartily despise him, and repulse whatever advances he makes. Now, you will cheer up, won't you, and be like yourself again? I must go, now, and get ready for the coming of papa, and my new step-ma! A kiss, Sandy, and I'm gone."

He embraced her fondly, and then she hurried away.

"Werry well execooted!" Kit muttered, still crouching in his concealment. "Ther gal, tho',

has ter do ther most of the manufacturin'. Sandy's as green as a skuleboy at love biz. Guess I better sneak off, an' cum up whistlin', as tho' no one had been kissed wi'in a hundred miles of here."

He suited action to the word, and directly approached the shanty, whistling.

"You're late," Sandy said. "We'll have to make big time, now."

"If I'd been 'arlier, I might 'a' prevented a smack!" was on the end of Kit's tongue, but he only answered;

"I guess we kin make it; you lead, an' I'll foller."

Without further parley they darted away through the gulch, toward the Indian's Nose, at a jog-trot.

Once Sandy paused to look at his watch.

It was half-past seven.

"We may have trouble in getting past the Nose!" he remarked. "At best, we can't get far beyond it before we encounter the stage."

They increased their speed. Both were good runners, and long-winded, and consequently did not mind the exercise.

At the Indian Nose (an abrupt bend in the course of the gulch), the trail curved close around the mass of jagged rocks, from which the place derived its name. The gulch there being quite wide, the two kept to the further side, and thus got by the proposed road-agents' trap, without encountering a soul.

Not pausing, they sped on, and re-entered the stage-trail, about a mile and a half above the Nose.

They were by this time beginning to get considerably "blowed," and came down to a walk.

"The stage is due, already," Sandy said, looking at his watch. "It's eight-fifteen!"

"It's lucky we got so fur," Kit replied. "We better make as fur as we can, however, fer the stage kin be heerd a good ways off, an' ef the road-agents war to hear it stop, they might smell a mice, and slide off."

"You reason well, Kit!" Sandy assented. "We must try to lay out these scoundrels. How many did you say there would be of them?"

"Two, sure—mebbe three—judgin' by what I could hear."

"Well, I'll register for two of 'em."

They continued on, for some distance further—then, from afar came the rumbling of heavy wheels.

"The stage!" Sandy announced. "We might as well stop here."

"Yas, but thar's one thing ye've fergot."

"What?"

"Ef we try to stop the hearse we may be tuk fer road-agents, an' git a hull shot-tower plugged thr'u' us!"

"True; but we must manage it somehow."

"I hev ther ijee. Build a fire in the middle of the trail, and stand near it. They'll take it as a signal o' danger, when we wave our head-gear."

"Good! We must be quick about it."

Combustible material was plenty in the vicinity, and they soon had a large heap of it in the trail,

Waiting until the stage was thundering along, close at hand, they applied a match. In an instant, a blaze shot upward, illuminating the surroundings.

On came the stage until it was less than a hundred rods away. Then it made a sudden halt.

"Hello, ahead, thar! What's the matter?" roared the stentorian voice of the driver.

"Come ahead to the fire!" shouted Sandy.

The vehicle, drawn by its four-in-hand, slowly drew near, and as it once more halted, a man's head was thrust from the window.

"What the dogs is up?" demanded Bill Blake, the Jehu, eying Sandy suspiciously. "Who are you?"

"Road-agents are waiting for you at the Nose, and we are here to warn you," Sandy replied.

"Is Mr. James Lyons aboard?"

"Yes; here I am!" cried the man with his head out of the window. "Hello! by my soul! is it you, Sandy?"

"It is, sir."

"You say there are road-agents ahead?"

"Yes, sir. They have designs upon your money and your lady's jewels."

"The deuce! How did you find this out?"

"My companion, here, Little Kit, overheard the plot between three masked men. He told me, and we came to help you through."

"Your kindness shall not be forgotten, overseer. Who is this boy?"

"A waif who is working under me—a new arrival."

"Ah! Now, about this unexpected trouble. How is it to be averted?"

"Leave that to me. Take Kit inside of the coach with you. I'll ride on the box with the driver. We will make the bend at a speed that will defy a hundred road-agents, providing the driver knows how to handle the ribbons!"

"You bet I do!" Blake said, grimly; "an' there's nary a team in the mountains that kin tech mine."

"Good! Now, then, Mr. Lyons, when I rap on the top of the stage, you and all parties inside crouch as low as possible, till you hear from me again. Get inside, Kit."

The boy obeyed; then the "hearse" resumed its journey. Sandy sat on the driver's seat, on the side from which he expected the attack was to be made. He held a pair of six-shooters in his grasp, and his penetrating gaze never once left the route ahead of them.

"How many have you got aboard?" he interrogated.

"Only the two, besides you fellers."

"Light, ain't you?"

"Generally that way, the trip this way."

"When I give the word, let go around the bend at breakneck speed, but take care you don't keel us over."

"You bet on that! Thet war the fu'st thing I l'arnt at drivin'—goin' safely 'round a sharp bend, helly-te-toot!"

They were now close to the Indian Nose.

Ahead lay nothing but darkness and uncertainty, but Sandy in a shrill whisper commanded:

"Now, then—let her go!" and at the same time rapped on the top of the coach.

Blake had no need to use the whip. All he had to do was slacken on the lines, and the four spirited horses leaped forward with a rush.

Around the bend they swept at full speed, the coach careening and running for some distance on the two side-wheels.

"Halt!" came in a hoarse yell, and a man leaped in front of the horses, endeavoring to check them in their headlong flight, while a second brigand attempted to clamber up the side of the stage.

Bang!

A bullet from Sandy's revolver went crashing through his shoulder, and he fell backward to the ground with a howl.

A terrified shriek from the lips of the other ruffian told that he had been trampled down beneath the horses' feet.

If there were any more of the party, they were careful to keep well out of sight.

The stage rushed on at the same furious rate, until well beyond the bend, when Sandy advised Blake to slow up, as all danger was over.

Without further incident the stage arrived at Ghoul Gulch, and after halting at the Grand Union to let Sandy and Kit off, drove on with Mr. and Mrs. Lyons to their residence.

"Not a word of what has happened!" Sandy said to Kit in a low tone. "By keeping quiet we may possibly be able to drop on the ring-leader of the gang."

"That's so. Guess ther captin' didn't participate in the 'tack."

"I should judge not. There were only two that I could see."

"Well, we'll see how the guv'nor deals out his gratitude ter-morrer. Didn't even say as much as Jack Robinson to me, by Jinks! I'm off fer a snooze, now. Take keer of yerself, Sandy."

"I will, Kit; good-night."

They separated then, Kit entering the Grand Union, and Sandy strolling on toward the Mabelle.

Entering that establishment, he found the usual crowd there as regarded numbers, and nearly all were engaged in games of chance.

Carlos de Castra, as usual suave and polite, moved about here and there, with a pleasant greeting for new-comers and a supervising eye to business.

He was literally as keen as a steel-trap, this oily Spaniard, and it is doubtful if Madam Midnight could have chosen a better representative of her interests.

Harry Hawk was not present, and Sandy concluded that he was at the Lyons mansion to welcome back the bonanza king and bride.

Sandy was just as well pleased. He felt in an ill-humor over what had occurred at the diggings that afternoon, and would not have cared to meet the superintendent, lest another quarrel arise that must surely be attended with unpleasant results.

That he was regarded with glances of curiosity and merriment he was quite conscious, as he sauntered about through the great room, and he knew by this fact that the report of the scene on the flats had received general circulation about the camp.

That many believed he really had been "mash-

ing" Miss Angeline he knew was probable, and his chagrin can better be imagined than described.

In sauntering about he encountered the long, gaunt individual, Steamboat Steve, who had acted as his second in the street duel.

"Hello, Sandy!" the Mississippian saluted, familiarly. "Just been looking for some genial fellow as kin play cards. What d'ye say to a game o' poker? If you're as good at cards as you are handy with a shootin'-iron, then I'll lay down my boodle an' sing anthems ov unbounded praise to ye."

Sandy had not taken a particular liking for the fellow from the first, and he now gave him a sharp scrutiny.

"Are you very desirous of losing your cash?" Sandy asked, dryly. "If so, you've not met the wrong man to tackle. I fancy I've met you before, sir."

"Like enough. Ef ye ever plied up an' down the old ragin' Mississip, et air more than likely. Ah! here's a vacant table. Here, waiter, fetch us a fresh deck."

Sandy was satisfied that the man was a professional card-sharp, but he was not the one to back down before a challenge, no matter what odds he had to contend with.

"What is to be—draw poker?"

"Yes—if you like."

"For what figure, as a starter?"

"A hundred dollars."

"Very good. Here's my stake. Cover it, and cut for deal!"

The money was planked, and the deal fell to Steamboat Steve.

"I see five hundred extra on this hand!" he said, a few minutes later.

"You are a good bluffer," Sandy observed. "Before we go any further, I propose we lay down that which talks!"

Without a word Steamboat Steve laid down his stake, in greenbacks, and Sandy did the same.

"Now, if you have no objections," he said, "I'll rake in the pot!" and he spread out his cards upon the table.

Steamboat Steve uttered an oath.

It was a winning hand.

"Are you satisfied?" Sandy asked, as he gathered up the money.

"Perfectly!" the Mississippian replied, with assumed nonchalance, and they rose from the table.

CHAPTER VI.

SANDY'S COURSE OF TRUE LOVE.

SANDY soon got interested in watching a four-handed game of eucher until twelve o'clock came; and with it the woman mystery of Ghoul Gulch, Madam Midnight.

Whither she came from, or how she gained entrance to the Mabille, Sandy failed to note, but there she was, at her post at the card-table, looking precisely the same as she did every night, at this particular hour.

Sandy did not go near the table, but kept aloof, and watched her narrowly. He had

made up his mind to one thing. If she left the Mabille that night, he was going to find out whither she went, if such a thing were possible.

That she knew something concerning his past, he was almost certain; yet, who or what she was, aside from her present calling, he could not imagine.

She evidently felt, by intuition, that he was watching her, for she gave him a quick, furtive glance occasionally, and as quickly returned her gaze to the board.

About two o'clock a dispute arose between two miners at the bar, which momentarily attracted Sandy's attention. When he again turned his attention to the faro-table, Madam Midnight had vanished.

A muttered exclamation of vexation escaped him, and he hastily made his exit by the rear way.

"She's as sly as an eel!" he muttered. "She can't be but a moment ahead of me!"

Without, the darkness now was dense, and a drizzling rain was falling; but ahead he fancied he saw a moving object, after which he hastened with the stealth of a fox, to soon discover that it was indeed Madam Midnight.

He bade fair soon to overtake her, when she turned around the corner of a shanty, and was lost from view.

Sandy continued on, and also rounded the corner, only to find himself confronting the muzzle of a revolver, held by the gloved hand of the madam.

"Stop!" she warned, quietly. "If I were you I would not tire myself by trying to play spy." Sandy could not find the use of his tongue.

"I wouldn't like to hurt you. What on earth ever caused you to dog my footsteps?" she demanded.

"To find out who you are that knows so much of my past!"

"Whatever caused you to suppose that I know anything of your past?"

"I cannot tell you—I hardly know; but I am sure you are in some way connected with my past life."

"Nonsense!" was all she answered.

"And you are evasive as you are mysterious."

"Not at all. Because I have on several occasions chosen to show you favor at the faro-table it is not saying that I am posted in your personal history."

"Tell me who you are, and I swear never to divulge the secret, except with your permission," he said, bending toward her with eagerness that was almost fiercely earnest.

She laughed at him provokingly.

"You go back to camp and forget that your curiosity ever got the better of you," she responded, advisedly. "If I ever catch you following me again I'll have to shoot you."

"You will?"

"As sure as I am Madam Midnight!"

"Well, I don't know but what I'd stand a bullet or two for the sake of knowing who you are. At all events, I'll find out sooner or later, or my name ain't Sandy!"

"Maybe it would not be to your advantage to know!" she said, significantly.

She glided away and Sandy stared after her

in perplexity, until the darkness hid her from view; then he turned and sought his own shanty.

During the next forenoon, when the men were at work in the diggings, and Sandy was at his usual post, a servant came over from the Lyons mansion and delivered him a note.

He tore it open and the following lay before him:

"DEAR SIR:—I request your immediate presence at my residence. Leave the boy in charge.

"Yours, etc.,
"JAS. LYONS."

"All right. Tell the gentleman I will call directly," he said to the servant.

Summoning the Denver Sport, he gave him instructions.

"Goin' ter see ther guv'nor, eh?" the boy asked. "Look out Angeliner don't git in yer hair!"

"Dry up!" Sandy growled.

He hurried over to his shanty and donned some more presentable attire, after which he started for the mansion, feeling more ill at ease than though he were about to face a regiment of enemies.

His ring was answered by the servant who had brought him the note, who ushered him into a pleasantly-furnished parlor, where three persons were seated—Mr. Lyons, Laurel and the new Mrs. Lyons.

"Mr. Sandy, my wife!" the bonanza king said, rising. "Louise, this is the gentleman who so opportunely came to our aid last night!"

Both parties acknowledged the introduction with a courtesy; both parties gave a visible start as their eyes met for an instant, and grew a trifle pale.

Mr. Lyons noticed it.

Laurel noticed it.

Neither, however, allowed their surprise to find the least expression.

Sandy, taking a seat, turned inquiringly to Mr. Lyons, who, aware of the young man's embarrassment, came quickly to his rescue.

"Well, Sandy, how have things been panning out during my absence?" he asked.

"Very nicely, sir, I believe. Mr. Hawk, I presume, can give you a better general idea."

"Undoubtedly, sir, but the lazy dog has not turned up, as yet, to welcome me back. By the way, I hear from sis, here, that you two gents had a slight unpleasantness, and Harry came out second best!" and the mine-owner laughed.

"I am sorry to say such was the case," Sandy replied, bowing. "We had a little dispute, and he grew hot-headed, as did I, and the result was a duel."

"Well, from what I can hear, you served the rascal right. He always was a disagreeable dog, and is more so since he came back to me a few months ago. I am sorry, however, that you crippled him, for I am now out of a clerk and secretary, to say nothing about a superintendent."

"I believe Mr. Hawk continues about the office, sir."

"That may be, but he is not capable of attending to my business in the way I want it attended to. I have been considering the matter, sir, and the obligations I am under to

you, and I have come to the conclusion that you are the man I want in Hawk's place. You are, I perceive, well educated, and have a fair capacity for business, and I am confident you would suit me."

"I do not deserve this kind treatment, Mr. Lyons, and I should not like to be the means of losing Mr. Hawk his position."

"That's my business. I give him your present job. It will suit him much better, in his present condition. You will take charge of the office to-morrow. And now, Sandy, there is another matter we had better come to an understanding about."

A slight flush came to the young man's cheek. He knew well enough what the subject was to be.

"You see," Mr. Lyons proceeded, "that I am a man who makes it a point to speak frankly. Laurel has been telling me that she has had the honor of making your acquaintance, and finding you an intelligent man and gentlemen, has formed an attachment for you, and believes that you have for her. She also tells me that Hawk warned you to keep away from here, or risk the peril of my great displeasure."

"He did, sir. The quarrel arose from that fact."

"Well, now, the matter stands this way; Laurel is my only surviving child, and I have the keenest of anxiety for her future welfare. I want to see her married to a worthy man, whose aim in life shall be to make her happy. It is not exactly necessary that this man shall be wealthy, as in event of my demise, Laurel becomes my sole heir. But I want her to have a man who shall be not only worthy of her, but shall also be of good name and reputation as a citizen."

"Your desire certainly is commendable," Sandy replied, earnestly.

"I think it is. Now, as far as I know you, I am well pleased with you, and believe, with Laurel, that you are a worthy young man. Still, as you are aware, we none of us have known you for longer than a few weeks. We are thus placed in a peculiar position. You have never given your real name, and that, in itself, would seem to indicate that there was a cloud hanging over your past, which made it necessary that you should remain *incognito*. Therefore until you can give us your real name, and some assurance that your character in the past has been and is yet above reproach, I cannot feel safe in saying that I approve of you as a suitor for Laurel's hand."

"And you are perfectly right!" Sandy assented heartily. "No judicious parent could favor the union of his daughter with a man without a name. I had a name, once—and was the only son of a most highly respectable family—but an unfortunate circumstance made me an outcast and a wanderer upon the world. I renounced the name belonging to me, and chose that which I now bear, in order that I might lose myself, among strangers, never to be recognized and connected with the past. I have told you all I can tell you—more than I have ever told any one else. As fate has decreed that I shall not mingle with society suited to my taste, I will do what is gentle-

manly, at least—pay your estimable daughter no further attentions than what a passing acquaintance warrants."

A trifle paler, but even more noble-looking and handsome than ever, he arose, hat in hand, to depart.

Laurel's face was turned away, and she was weeping softly to herself.

Mr. Lyons was evidently somewhat affected. He arose and put forth his hand.

"I am more than pleased with your answer, Sandy, because you express the sentiment of a noble-minded man. What your past has been, I will not ask. I have every confidence you can some day render a satisfactory explanation. Until then you are always welcome to our family circle, and I shall, believe me, take the keenest interest in promoting your welfare."

"I am very grateful, sir; more I can hardly say, I think. I will bid you a good-morning."

And bowing, he took his departure.

He went back to the diggings, literally a new man.

During the day the matter of the attempted stage-robbery became public through the facts being made known by Mr. Lyons, and Sandy and Kit were the heroes of the camp.

A posse of men were deputized to visit the Indian's Nose and bring in the two outlaws, if anything was to be found of them, but the mission was unsuccessful; no trace of the brigands, dead or alive, was to be found.

During the afternoon Sandy saw Mr. Lyons standing just outside the office engaged in conversation with Harry Hawk, the superintendent. Judging from occasional gesticulations, on the part of the latter, Sandy formed the opinion that Mr. Lyons was making known his proposed change.

"There will be trouble out of it!" Sandy mused, as he watched the miners at their work. "Hawk is as thorough a rascal as one can pick up, and I know he will strike back with a will, if I succeed to his position. If he does, he'll not catch me napping. I've an idea that he was connected with that stage robbery, but unfortunately have no evidence to use against him. And—that woman! By Heaven, my time for revenge does not look so far off! Will she assume the offensive or the defensive? I shall not have to wait long, I fancy, to find out!"

And Kit, too, as he worked away, preserved that thoughtful and withal anxious expression of countenance.

He looked keenly at Sandy now and then; which act the latter noticed, and wondered what he meant.

CHAPTER VII.

A NEAT LITTLE GAME.

AFTER work was over for that day, Kit went to the hotel, got his supper and made some slight alterations in his meager toilet.

When he came out of doors he found Sandy sitting on the steps of the veranda, engaged in smoking, while he watched the swarm of miners and others who filled the street.

"Ah! is that you, Kit? I was just waiting for you," Sandy said. "I wanted to have a chat with you."

"Thet so? Well, I'm allers open fer an argyment, you bet!" declared the boy.

"Come! we will take a little walk up the gulch where we will not be apt to be overheard, or interrupted."

A few minutes served to take them out of the camp proper, where there were no dwellings, and they found seats, facing each other, upon a couple of bowlders.

Tossing Kit a cigar, and giving him time to light it, Sandy watched him, a moment, intently.

"Kit!" he said, finally, "do you know what my thoughts are, just now—what they have been, all day?"

"Ken't say as I do, Sandy. "Ye see, I didn't happen to be born a walkin' microscope ner a mind-reader."

"May be not. But just allow me to tell you that I believe you are a first-class fraud."

"Humph! You're complementary, I'll be darned ef ye ain't. What's bitin' ye? What the blazes have I done to make ye thunk it?"

"Well, I'm not positive that you have done anything in particular, thus far, but I suspect you're not all you seem. Own up the truth, now. Hadn't you a *mission*, that brought you to Ghoul Gulch?"

"Ho! ho! a mission? Yas, you bet I had! Pecuniary circumstances forced me to make an omission of a number uv square meals, and I made it my mission ter come heer in s'arch of grub."

"Evasively answered. Nevertheless, I am not one to be easily deceived. You did not come here from Denver, at all. You came from Chicago!"

"Waal, if ye know more 'bout it then I do, ther' ain't no use o' me sayin' a word!" and Kit grinned provokingly.

"Am I not right?"

"Dunno! Reckon you ain't, tho'."

"You reckon! You are non-committal. You might as well out with it, for I suspect you. You *were sent here to hound me!*"

"Git out! You're crazy! Ther' idea o' a young rat like me, a-houndin' a big feller like you! The way ye talk, you'd 'most make a feller thunk he do amount to somethin'!"

"Bah! nonsense! You are awful innocent, but I'll guarantee a sharper young whelp don't live. Let me tell you, however, that I'll never be taken back to Chicago alive!"

There was a stern ring to Sandy's voice, and a deadly gleam in his eye, all of which went to prove that he was in earnest.

Kit eyed him askance, his face still distorted by its irrepressible grin.

"Ef ye wait till I tote yer back to Chicago, you'll wait a long while," was his answer. "An' now, if you've got thr'u', let's go back ter camp."

"Very well. Please understand this much, however: I know you in your true light, now, and shall govern myself accordingly. You are not here alone. You have a confederate. You give him my respects, and tell him I am not afraid of him!"

"When I see sich a feller, I'll tell him!" said Kit, soberly enough.

They arose, and went back to camp, saying nothing until they came to the Mabille; then Sandy turned to Kit, and gave him a sharp, searching glance, as if trying to read his innermost thoughts."

"Kit, I did you a friendly act."

"Bet ye did, ole stockin's, an' I'm jest ther sort of hairpin w'ot 'preciates sech a thing."

"If I thought you didn't, I'd be tempted to give you pretty hard usage."

"An' I'd jest let ye apply ther toe of yer boot to ther seat o' my pants with a vengeance, I would. Squeal out, now. I know yer wanter ax sumthin', an' ef I kin return ther favor, I'll do it, sure!"

"I want you to truthfully answer one question. Do you know the person who is known here as Madam Midnight?"

"I do. There, now, don't ax me no further, for sure's my name is Bricktop, I won't answer ye. Jest ye keep joggin' right along, mindin' yer biz, an' ye've a show ter die rich an' respected. It's a good day fer fishin', but you keep right on hoein' corn, an' the fish won't bite you," and without another word the young red-head turned and strode away.

Sandy gazed after him with a frown.

"I thought they were connected," he muttered. "Both are undoubtedly detectives, and this Madam Midnight is the head one. Let me see: she was here several weeks ahead of me. Could she have known of my intention of coming here? I rather fancy not. If not, they are not after me. Perhaps they are after Mrs. Lyons and the fellow, Steamboat Steve."

That same night, in the wee sma' hours, there was a dim light in the front parlor of the Lyons residence, and Harry Hawk paced impatiently to and fro across the richly-carpeted floor.

His face wore a scowl, and the expression of his dark, sinister eyes was not good, to say the least.

Directly his face brightened, as he heard a light footstep, and the new Mrs. Lyons swept into the room.

She wore a waterproof with hood attached, which enveloped her figure.

Her face, which was one of some beauty, was cold in its expression as she faced Hawk.

"Not a word here," she murmured. "I gave him a drug, but he may not sleep long. We must seek a safer place."

"We had better get out in the open air. Steve is waiting outside anyhow," the dark man answered. "There is no one prowling around at this hour, and we can converse without fear of interruption."

He stealthily led the way from the house, and she followed, closing the door behind her.

They quickly left the grounds, outside of which they were joined by Steamboat Steve. When they halted, they were in close proximity to the spot where the interview had previously taken place between Sandy and Kit.

"Well, now, let's understand ourselves," Hawk spoke at last, lighting a cigar. "I see you have made your point, Cassie."

"As far as it amounts to anything, I have," the new Mrs. Lyons answered.

"Humph! What would you ask for—the earth?"

"Oh, no! What's on it would suit me better. If you fancy that I've fallen into a bonanza dip, you are much mistaken."

"Explain yourself."

"Well, in the first place, you are doubtless aware that we are being most emphatically, perseveringly and determinedly hunted for."

"I believe I am. I should hardly have left Chicago, to come here, if things had not looked suspiciously warm for me there."

"I, too, was satisfied for my part," Cassie declared, "and Steve here, had no reason to be to the contrary. That unfortunate Morton murder was too bad. Thank Heaven my name was never brought in connection with the affair, even by my professional name. Well, as I was about to say, when I got to this dull camp, I naturally calculated everything safe. Fancy my consternation, when I had been here only a few hours, at meeting face to face, one of our fattest victims!"

"Who?"

"Dick Douglass. You remember the tenth of last March?"

Hawk uttered an oath.

"Well, curse my stupidity!" he exclaimed. "I could not locate the fellow, until now that you recall that night, although I have had a notion all along, that we had met before. So, this Sandy is the fellow we cleaned out of the fifty thousand?"

"The same."

"Did he recognize you?"

"Of course. He is not the person to easily forget a foe. So you see the fix we are in. We could hardly be in greater peril if we were back in Chicago."

"You reckon he'll make it warm for us, then?"

"I fear so."

"Maybe two can play at that game, you know. I've got a grudge against the chap, anyhow."

"If he will act, he has already sent for help. I fancy, though, on second thought, that unless he is crowded, he won't precipitate the attack. You see, there's officers wanting him, too, and he evidently came here to lose himself from the reach of the law."

"Curse him! that's not going to help him. The old man has changed our positions, and put him in my place. If I don't get square with him my name ain't Harry Hawk."

"Be careful what you do, Harry. I fear this man more than I do any of our enemies. A word from him would get me kicked out of my beloved Jimmy's house, and knock everything in the head."

"Well, what's to be done?"

"There is but one course plain to me. We must gobble on to all the lucre we can raise and skip. Providing I could get sufficient wealth to out-balance my affection for my dear Jimmy, I don't believe but I should be quite satisfied to make a change of base."

"Ye'r' sensible," Steamboat Steve added. "There's no doubt but we could find hundreds

of safer places. I know one thing: I was tracked some distance after I left Chicago, and am not positive I threw the hounds of the law off my trail, even then. There may be a detective here watching for me this very minute."

The trio exchanged glances of alarm.

"I'm cursed if I like the looks of matters, myself," Hawk growled. "Once the law gets a grip on us, we're gone, for there's certainly old charges enough standing against us to set us to breaking stone for ten years. If you two had only kept away, confound you, I'd have been all right."

"Wouldn't you, though?" Cassie sneered. "You'd like us to lift everything off of your shoulders. Your kind wishes are likely to strike in and kill you one of these days. No! I am glad we are all together."

"Why?"

"Because in union there is strength. We have been partners in many a little game for gain, and I know we'll need each other's co-operation in the future."

"I know one thing," Hawk growled. "You always managed to get more than the lion's share of all the business we did. You can sport around diamonds to the tune of ten thousand dollars, while I'm lucky to have ten dollars about my pocket."

"It's your own fault. Gambling rarely makes a person rich, for they who gamble, as a rule, never salt anything away. With me it was different, so you have nothing to growl about. Is it decided that we had better pull up stakes?"

"Them's my sentiments," declared Steve.

"I'm cursed if I care to be yanked into custody!" Hawk snarled.

"Both of you are sensible. If we can make a big haul before we go, we are all right. Lyons keeps most of his wealth about him, outside of the mines, I understand."

"He does. In his office there's a big burglar-proof safe, wherein lays 'most all of his ready cash, and it ain't no small sum, you can bet. Then he has a smaller safe in which he keeps a few thousand at a time to carry on business with."

"Had you access to these safes?"

"Only to the small one, you bet. Only a professional sharp could open the other by long practice and proper tools, for besides the combination locks, the old gent always carries a hasp key."

"I dare to presume I could open it," Cassie cried, her eyes gleaming. "It will be the first one I ever failed on if I cannot. It is the same one Lyons has my diamonds locked up in for safe-keeping."

"You can bet they're safe then," Hawk chuckled. "The racket will have to be worked with care. If we could implicate Sandy in it, it would be a good idea, and I fancy I can work it."

"We are listening."

"Well, it will require a couple of days and nights to do it in. To-morrow, or rather, this morning, Sandy takes charge of the office, has the handling of the cash, and the closing up of the office, and is virtually responsible for the safety of everything. About this time twenty-four hours hence we will meet again. I will

enter the office and take a couple of thousand dollars from the small safe. Miss Angeline hates Sandy for a fancied injury, a job having been put up on her by, I suspect, the young rascal, Kit. I can work her like a babe, and cause her to denounce Sandy as being the robber out of revenge upon him. I can imitate his handwriting to perfection, or any one's, for that matter."

"Your idea is good, so far. But go on."

"On the next night, if the land lays good, you shall have an opportunity to try the big safe, and if you succeed in opening it, we'll seize upon the lucre immediately and skip. I know of a safe place where we can hide until the affair blows over a little—then, we can go where we deem it the safest!"

"Good idea!" Steamboat Steve agreed.

"I think so," chimed in Cassie. "I must get back, for fear the governor might awaken, and that would explode everything."

On the ensuing morning Mr. and Mrs. Lyons ate breakfast alone, Laurel not having yet come down-stairs, and Hawk having already gone to the diggings.

"My dear," the bonanza king said, "I have something to ask you—something that struck me as being rather queer when I noticed it. When this man-enigma, Sandy, paid me a call yesterday, I noticed that when you two saw each other, immediate recognition was observable. Will you kindly explain to me how this happens?"

"James, I will, for it is but right you should know," Mrs. Lyons said composedly. "You see, this Sandy is not Sandy at all, but Dick Douglass, by name. I made his acquaintance over a year ago at a reception and learned that he was the son and partner of a well-to-do Philadelphia gentleman and speculator. He represented the firm in Chicago and bought up grain in their interest for the Eastern markets, the old gent supplying the money."

"Well?"

"After forming my acquaintance, he paid me considerable attention for a while, and I grew to look upon him as a suitor. One night he told me he had just received fifty thousand dollars from his father, with which to catch on to a corner in grain. The next day he came to bid me good-by, saying he was forced to fly to parts unknown. He had lost every cent of the money at cards, and had written to his father to that effect; but knowing his father to be a stern, unforgiving man, nothing remained for him but flight. A week later I learned that the elder Douglass was in Chicago, hunting for Dick with a posse of detectives. That's all I know about the matter."

Mr. Lyons looked very much disappointed when he left his residence and walked toward the office.

CHAPTER VIII.

A POST-OFFICE TEAR.

SANDY was already at the office, and the miners had gone to work, when Mr. Lyons reached there.

"Good-morning," Sandy saluted. "Pleasant morning, sir."

"Quite so. I thought I would run down and see how you are getting started."

"I have not done anything more than dispatch the men to work. In regard to matters within the office, I preferred to receive instructions from you, sir, before touching anything, in order that you might see how things were before I took charge."

"Very sensible of you. We will get to work and see how Harry has left things. Where is the under clerk?"

"He has resigned, saying he did not care to stay, unless Hawk had charge."

"Indeed! That's rather singular. I have occasionally noticed that he and Harry were pretty thick together. If there is any worthy person you have to suggest as a helper, it is your privilege."

"Considering the service he has already done you, I should say young Kit was as deserving of promotion as any one."

"True. I had nearly forgotten the lad. If you think he will answer your purpose, you shall have him."

They then made an examination of the different books and accounts, and Mr. Lyons looked dissatisfied.

"I see that Harry has largely overdrawn his salary, which he had no authority to do. Let it pass, however. I trust my new superintendent will not do likewise."

"You need have no fear, sir. You will find that my conduct of the business will bear the closest scrutiny."

"I hope so. Here are five thousand and one hundred dollars which I leave in the small safe for general business purposes, although it is necessary to use but a small portion of it to meet the running expenses. Here is the key to the combination of the safe."

A few more explanations were made; then Mr. Lyons took his departure.

After he was gone, Sandy sent for Kit, who directly made his appearance, evidently a good deal surprised.

"Did ye send for me, Sandy?" he demanded, poking his head in at the door.

"Yes. Come in, Kit. I've got you an easier job in the office. Can you write?"

"Reckon!"

"And figure?"

"Sum. Guess I could figger out how many cubes of quarter-inch blocks would go in a box o' the dimensions of a square inch!"

"You'll answer, I guess. Your business will be to remain at the office and do whatever I have to set you at."

"Korrect. But, how about the collat, Sandy?"

"Oh, that will be fixed all right! What Lyons don't give you, I'll make up out of my own pocket."

So Kit assumed his new position, and during the day proved that he not only knew how to read and write, but was a creditable book-keeper.

At six o'clock, after paying off the men, Sandy locked the safe, put everything to rights, and left the office, taking good care to lock the door behind him.

He then sought his own shanty, where he prepared and ate his evening meal.

"Hawk took the change very coolly," he mused, as he seated himself in the doorway, after he had finished his supper. "What does he mean? No good, I'll vouch. The new Mrs. Lyons recognized me, and since then it occurs to me that Harry Hawk and the fellow Steamboat Steve are the same two men who were prowling near her residence the night I was robbed. They are all here together, and have designs upon James Lyons's property. Shall I expose them? Or shall I watch and baffle them?"

He sat for over an hour in deep thought.

"If Kit is not here to spy upon me, he is here for another purpose. Perhaps it is to seize upon this precious bundle of blacklegs, who cleaned me out, and made me an outcast."

When it was dark, he arose and sauntered over to the general grocery store, which also contained the post and telegraph offices.

All three departments were run by a dwarfed, little hump-backed individual, with keen eyes and dark complexion, who had the reputation of being as shrewd a business man as Ghoul Gulch boasted of.

The store was a favorite resort about mail time, which was when the stage arrived, and among those present as he entered, Sandy beheld the giant who had acted as referee at the duel, and who had announced himself as Monkey Mouth, the chaw-em-up, and very appropriately so, too.

The giant's appearance had not changed a particle, only that, if anything, he was dirtier and more bloodthirsty-looking than ever.

His notice fell upon Sandy the moment he entered, and a glare of hatred entered his bloodshot eyes.

"Thar ho air, an' he's my roast o' rib for a dollar!" he muttered to himself, while he winked knowingly at several of Ghoul Gulch's hardest cases, who were ruffians of the most pronounced character.

It was evident that the giant meant mischief.

"Good-evening, Bondul," Sandy accosted, addressing the storekeeper. "Did you get any answer from that telegram?"

"I did that," the hunchback replied, handing Sandy a piece of paper. "Here it is!"

Sandy received it and glanced over it, an expression of satisfaction coming upon his face.

The message was from Leadville, and read as follows:

"MR. SANDY. SIR:—I will start at once, with the power to make the arrests.

"R. JAYNE, Dep. Sheriff."

While Sandy was engaged in the perusal, Monkey Mouth had stolen nearer, with the evident intention of looking over the superintendent's shoulder.

Sandy anticipated this, however, and quickly put the paper in his pocket.

"See hyar, me bloomin' young goslin', s'posin' ye let me hev a squint at that air paper!" the giant snorted, putting his arms akimbo and striking an attitude. "Jest do yer royal uncle ther honor ter let him into yer secret, me duck."

"I rather guess not, darling," Sandy re-

plied. "I am amply able to digest my own messages."

"Kerwhoop-wow-o! d'ye hear him now? Sez he won't let old rampageous Monkey Mouth see that air dockymen—ther original Monkey Mouth, ther great chaw'-em-up of Chico. Oh, thunder! oh, rantankerous alligators! What way shall I annihilate him fer his impudence?"

"Maybe you'd better not adopt any positive plan," Sandy suggested. "I don't half believe you really want to get hurt, and therefore, I should advise you not to attempt anything rash."

"Ye wouldn't, hey? Ye think I orten git up an' chaw on ye, like I would a plug of old navy, hey? Then, jest ye waltz out that aire telegraf dispatch, before I walk all over ye!" the giant cried, his aspect growing momentarily more ferocious.

"You'll have some tall walking to do, sweetness, before you get that message," Sandy answered, his composure not in the least ruffled. "I want you to understand, Mr. Chaw'-em-up, that you can't chaw even one side of me, and as for walking over me, you'll have to wait till the woodbine twineth over my three by six!"

"Ye won't surrender that message, then, ter me, ther champion scrouger o' Sorrocco—ther roarin' cadaverous pestilence from Pineville?"

"Not by a long shot, you big porpoise!"

"Then by the great eternal, I'll mop this yer' floor wi' ye, till ther ain't enough left o' you ter make a taller dip of!"

And with the words, the giant made a leap forward that threatened to carry the young superintendent off his feet.

It did not turn out that way, however. The handsome man evidently had no idea of becoming the bullwhacker's victim. His steel-like fist shot forward with a suddenness that was surprising, considering that his arms had previously been folded, and Monkey Mouth received a terrific blow between the eyes, that nearly carried him off his feet, ponderous as he was.

A howl of rage burst from his lips, and once more he made a furious rush for Sandy, intent on clinching with him, but again that catapult of muscle and bone struck out, and caught the chaw'-em-up full in the mouth, knocking several of his tusk-like teeth from the sockets and causing him to reel backward, and choke until he was purple.

"See hyer, this ain't fair!" a quartette of the roughs cried, stepping forward. "We ain't goin' ter see Monk git abused by no lout of a sport, like you, nary a time."

"Oh! then your baby elephant isn't equal to the emergency, eh?" and Sandy smiled scorn fully.

"Ef he can't lick yer, we kin!" the spokesman cried, whose handle was Cranky Jim. "We kin show ye that ye can't maul whoever ye please, hyer in Ghoul Gulch."

"Indeed! So you think the combined crowd of you brutes possess sufficient stamina to tear out a single man, eh? Well, now, you might possibly be mistaken."

And a pair of six-shooters suddenly appeared in Sandy's grasp, leveled at the ruffians.

Just how they appeared so suddenly in the superintendent's grasp, or where they came

from no one present could have given a clear idea; yet there they were, looking at Cranky Jim and his pals threateningly.

"Take keer thar!" Cranky cried. "Put up them aire shutin'-irons, wull ye? Ye might let 'em go off!"

"You never told a bigger truth! I did not come here to fight, but if you are hankering after a scrimmage, I'm jest the gent to accommodate you. If you pick me up for a flat, you're liable to drop me ag'in for a hot flat-iron."

"I dunno whether we aire or not!" Cranky growled. "Hi, Monkey! shall we stamp on him?"

The giant had by this time sufficiently recovered from his discomfiture to take in the situation.

"Kerwhoop! Yes, sail in an' tear the cussed skunk limb from limb. D'ye hear? Cut off his head an' use et fer a football," he yelled. "Hurry! I, ther great chaw'-em-up, will head the movement."

"Halt!" Sandy shouted, as they were about to rush in a body upon him. "I give you all fair warning, and you'd better heed it. Death will greet you if you come for me."

"If ye shoot, ye'll be hanged!" cried Cranky Jim.

"And if I don't shoot I'll be hanged!" Sandy retorted. "You pay your money and take your choice—so suit yourselves!"

The ruffians hesitated.

Although they could have torn the superintendent limb from limb with a good will, they were by no means anxious to venture into the jaws of what promised to be certain death.

"At 'im!" the giant howled. "Aire five of us afeard o' one chap o' that galoot's figger? One! two! three! at him!"

Freshly inspired, the ruffians, with vengeful yells, leaped toward Sandy, who stood fearlessly awaiting them.

Bang! bang! bang!

Three times a jet of flame leaped forth, and almost with the same breath Cranky Jim and two of his companions dropped to the floor.

The fourth wheeled about and ran for dear life out of the post-office, while Monkey Mouth paused, with a baffled oath.

"Shute!" he roared. "Take advantage o' yer drap while you've got it, ye low-lived cuss!"

"No, I'll not shoot!" Sandy replied. "I'll spare you, for I've no desire to kill so worthy a case as you. You're too pretty and sweet to plant yet. Face about, and get out of this building the liveliest you know how, and all will be right. If you disobey me, I'll tell the public who played up—"

"Let up! I call quits!" the giant cried, his jaw dropping, and a sudden fear seizing him. "You're a square cuss, an' when I say quits, I mean it!" and he left the post office, his face a study in its changing expressions of fear, baffled rage and chagrin.

Sandy restored his revolvers to his hip holsters, and laughed quietly.

He then left the post-office and walked away as if nothing had happened.

The job for the undertaker was not complete, however. Examination proved that neither of the

three roughs were mortally injured. So that in a few minutes Cranky and his two confederates were restored to consciousness.

Not long after the shooting, Monkey Mouth, Cranky Jim, and the other three toughs met, just outside the camp proper, and not far from Sandy's shanty.

"Now ter bizness, boys!" the giant said. "We all allow we want revenge on this cussed galoot w'ot calls hisself Sandy?"

"You bet!" the others chimed in.

"Now, I purpose we fix things, an' give him a boost he won't fergit!"

"How d'ye mean?"

"Easy enuff. Spikey, hyer, has a duplicate key ter the powder-house. We gits a couple o' kegs ov giant-powder, an' roll 'em in under the shanty, which stands up, on stilts, an' set 'em off wi' a long train, so we won't git hurt. Whoop-ee! won't the cuss think a cyclone hev struck him?"

"Bully! Ye'r a genius, Monk!" Cranky Jim cried. "We does ther trick, you bet, and Hawky goes back in ther office to-morrow."

The villains then and there shook hands over their diabolical plan, and set out to perfect arrangements for putting it into execution.

CHAPTER IX.

THE BIGGEST RACKET OF ALL.

Two miles down the gulch, from the mining-town, a trail wound up among the craggy mountains, such as might have been worn by grizzlies or other animals.

A figure in male attire came down the gulch, and clambered up the rugged path, which was steep and winding.

In ten minutes a rocky shelf was gained.

Opening back into the solid rock of the mountain, from the bench, was a cavern somewhat larger than the ordinary parlor of a dwelling.

A fire was burning within, its blaze furnishing sufficient illumination to disclose the fact that the interior was rudely but comfortably furnished.

Before the fire sat a young woman, plainly but neatly attired, engaged in roasting a piece of venison upon the end of a pointed stick.

She was apparently not over twenty years of age, and the firelight shining upon her face revealed a glorious picture of girlish beauty.

The person upon the ledge stood watching her a few minutes, admiringly—then, he advanced into the cavern.

She sprung up, and uttered a glad little cry, as she saw him.

"Ah! is it you, Kit? Something seemed to tell me that you would be here, to-night. Take a seat."

"Bet I will!" Kit assented. "It takes the atmosphere out o' me to climb the trail."

"It is rather a tedious climb. How are matters progressing in Ghoul Gulch, Kit?"

"Swimmingly. Jest tell ye, sis, things aire narrowin' down to a close, an' we'll soon have to file up our spurs in true fi'tin' trim."

"The sooner the better. I am getting tired of the monotony, to tell the truth."

"Guess things aire narrowin' down ter a focus. Ye know what I told ye last night."

"Yes."

"Well, that can't be helped, I reckon, but the plan can be carried out. As for t'other plan, I paid a private wisit to ther post-office arter I were heer."

"How did you make out?"

"Nothin' fer us, but I found suthin' of importance tho'."

"What was it? Don't keep me in suspense."

"Waal, I found a letter lyin' on the table 'dressed ter the postmaster. It were evidently an answer ter sum letter ther postmaster had written ter some one, in answer ter a former letter ov inquiry. Heer's a duplereut copy of it."

He handed her a piece of paper, on which was written:

"CHICAGO, —, 188—.

"DEAR SIR:—The man you describe, in answer to my inquiry, is undoubtedly the one I seek. Keep an eye on his movements, and I will pay you well for it. I will arrive in Ghoul Guich on the 18th inst.

"ERASTUS DOUGLASS."

"That is a litteral cappin' o' ther climax, ain't it?" Kit grinned. "Ther old man's as hot arter Sandy as an indignant hornet."

An expression of defiance flashed into the girl's eyes.

"He is all for gold!" she said, bitterly. "He will find, however, that he cannot always have things his own way. Let me see—to-morrow is the 18th?"

"Yes."

"Well, we shall have to put our wits together and be prepared for the work ahead of us, Kit."

The work of preparing for the destruction of Sandy's domicile did not consume much time, and the task was at last completed to the satisfaction of the schemers who had planned the job.

Two kegs of giant powder had been stolen from the powder-house, and after being tapped were rolled in under Sandy's shanty, the floor of which was a couple of feet or more from the ground.

A heavy train of powder was then laid from the kegs to a spot some three hundred yards away.

Here the five conspirators grouped together, when everything was ready for the explosion, which was to send Dick Douglass to "Kingdom Come."

A strong breeze swept down the gulch, and Monkey Mouth had to strike several matches, before he could keep one lit long enough, to apply it to the powder-train.

He succeeded, finally, however, and a streak of fire shot toward the doomed shanty.

An instant later, there was a terrific explosion, and a glare of light, as the shanty flew heavenward, in a thousand pieces!

The ruins instantly took fire, and lit up the scene as bright a day.

"Guess he's blowed all ter grease-spots!" Monkey Mouth grunted. "Come! There's a crowd comin' this way. Ther job's finished an' we better git up an' git!"

"Haven't you made a little mistake? I've an idea the job isn't quite finished!"

The words came in ringing tones from behind them.

They wheeled around, aghast, and as of one accord, uttered a cry of surprise!

Before them stood Sandy, the light of the fire gleaming upon the polished barrels of the revolvers he held leveled in his grasp.

"The job isn't finished yet!" he repeated, sternly, "but it will be when I'm done," and his revolver spoke forth the death-warrant of the Chico giant.

Again and again, the leaden messenger called its man to account, until, with the fifth report, five men lay stretched out upon the sod, never to rise again.

Then, not caring to encounter the crowd that flocked toward the scene of the explosion, Sandy turned, and walked rapidly away.

The morning following the fire, dawned bright and clear. The Denver Sport was on his way to the office, rather earlier than usual, when he encountered Harry Hawk.

The ex-superintendent carried a neatly-wrapped package in his hand, and seemed in a more pleasant mood than usual.

"Good-morning, Kit!" he saluted. "Where bound?"

"To the office, I reckon."

"But you're too early. I say, you've got time to run an errand for me. There's a V in it for you. Will you go?"

"Dunno. Depends 'cordin' to circumstances. What is it?"

"Why, I want you to take this letter and package to the house, and deliver it to Miss Angelina, or, if she's not up, tell the servant to give it to her. Mind you, it's a surprise for her, and if you're ever asked, you're not to tell who gave it to you. Do you understand?"

"You bet!"

"Well, will you do it?"

"For a ten-er!"

"You young scamp! But, never mind! Here's the cash. Now, off with you, and don't let the grass grow under your feet!"

"They're so numerous in size that no grass c'u'd ever git a chance!" Kit grinned, trotting off.

On his way to the Lyons residence, he eyed the package and the letter, with a strange smile.

"Bet a red herring I kin tell what's in the bundle," he averred. "I didn't hear a nocturnal interview all fer nothin'. Sandy, old stockin's, yer prospects luk away below par. But, don't git down in the mouth. When me an' sis do make our move, in this game o' checkers, some-thin's goin' ter drap."

Arrived at the mansion, he was informed that the fair Angeline had not yet arisen from her couch, so he left the letter and package in charge of a servant, and hurried back to the office, where he found Sandy already opening up for the day's business.

CHAPTER X.

SANDY IN DEEP DISGRACE.

His face did not wear its usual good-natured expression; on the contrary, he looked decidedly out of spirits.

"Hello, Sandy—I hear they've bin tryin' ter make a Czar out ov you," Kit saluted. "Didn't know we war livin' in Russian Ameriky, whar thar's a loaded Nihilist under every stick an' stone."

"No, I did not. I guess, however, the ones who blew my shanty up will have to try their experiments in a different climate henceforth."

During the forenoon a large number of curious persons passed the office, and took particular pains to look in, evidently to see the superintendent. No attempt, however, was made to arrest him, although by sending Kit out upon the street, Sandy learned that the killing of the five ruffians, and the explosion, were foremost topics of conversation.

Mr. Lyons made his appearance at the office about ten o'clock, took up a paper and began to read, while Kit and Sandy continued at their office work, which, though not extensive, kept them employed during the better share of the day.

All three stepped to the open window, as the forenoon stage was heard to roll into the camp, for, coming from the East it usually brought a number of passengers.

Among the passengers, to-day, who disembarked in front of the Grand Union Hotel, was a short, fat individual, of past middle age, with a smooth face, pug nose and florid complexion.

He was well dressed, carried a valise, and had evidently come from a distance.

Behind him, and evidently his companion, was another man—a wiry, angular individual, smooth-faced, well dressed, and gifted with a habitual watchfulness on either side of him, that would indicate him to be either a hunted criminal or a detective.

Kit saw these two men; Sandy saw them; Mr. James Lyons saw them.

Kit made a sly glance at the handsome superintendent, and saw that his face had turned very pale.

It was no matter of surprise to the youth.

The man who had first got out of the stage, was Erastus Douglass.

"Kit, run down to the post-office, and get my mail!" Mr. Lyons ordered. "I am anxious to see how stocks stand!"

"Yes, sir," and seizing his hat, the boy was off like a shot. Office work was too tame for his nature; he loved to be out of doors.

He was hardly gone, when Sandy turned back into the office, and put on his coat and hat.

Mr. Lyons looked at him in surprise.

"Hello! what's the matter, Sandy?" he asked.

"Something has happenad, Mr. Lyons, which demands that I immediately quit your employ," was the answer. "I trust you will pardon me for leaving on so short notice, but it is imperative I should go at once. Whatever balance of salary is due me, you can give to Kit, if so you choose."

"But, Sandy, isn't there something remarkable about this sudden action?"

"Only so far, sir, as concerns myself and my past. Give my regards to your daughter, and tell her my affection for her will never cease, tho' miles upon miles may separate us."

He turned then, quitted the office, and hurried

down the gulch, the irregular line of shanties soon hiding him from view.

Mr. Lyons was sorely perplexed, and paced to and fro within his office.

"What can have caused his sudden departure?" he mused. "Was he afraid trouble would come of the shooting affair? I don't believe it. He is not a man to run from an attack, even though the people were against him, *en masse*. Perhaps the arrival of the stage had something to do with his abrupt departure."

Kit returned in a few minutes, with a bundle of letters and papers.

"Hello! Whar's Sandy?" he demanded, on not seeing the superintendent, his face assuming an anxious expression.

"You tell me, and I'll tell you!" Mr. Lyons replied. "He left immediately after you did, and made no mention of coming back. It is the most singular case I ever knew."

Kit gave vent to a long whistle of surprise.

"You go over to the diggings, Kit, and tell Harry I want him, at once. You remain there, and see how well you can fill his position."

Kit hardly liked the idea of this, but seeing no reasonable excuse for refusing, he obeyed.

He realized pretty clearly how it was all going. The web was weaving around Sandy as sure as fate, and since he had suddenly taken French leave, the prospects of extricating him from it looked rather dubious.

The boy went to the diggings, as ordered, and made known his errand.

There was a perceptible expression of triumph on Hawk's face as he hurried toward the office.

He found Mr. Lyons in a decidedly unpleasant humor.

"Here I am, sir—what's wanted?" he asked, on entering the office.

"I want you to resume your former place here!" the bonanza king answered gruffly. "That fellow, Sandy, has suddenly left my employ, and I judge we've seen the last of him."

"Why, 'pon my word, that's strange! Have you looked around to see if everything is all right?"

"No. I'm satisfied he is perfectly honest, however."

"I wouldn't take a whole block of stock in the fellow. It won't be no harm to investigate, I suppose?"

"Of course not. Look in the small safe; I'll guarantee he couldn't open the other."

Hawk did as directed, his eyes gleaming maliciously.

He brought forth a small money-drawer, and began counting.

"Phew! Something wrong, as I suspected. Here's but a handful of money, compared with the usual amount. I'll be shot if he hasn't gotten away with three thousand dollars! Count it yourself, sir. There's two thousand here, less the amount of last night's pay-roll."

"This seems incredible!" Mr. Lyons said, counting over the notes and coin which Hawk had placed before him. "I had great confidence in the fellow, although I had heard a bad report of him since his promotion. He is certainly a double-dyed villain to take advantage of me so soon."

"I should say so. What do you propose to do about the matter?"

"Confound it. I'll make it a bad job for him, if such a thing is possible. Hang out a placard offering five hundred dollars reward for his capture!"

"Brother, what is that for—what is the matter?"

Miss Angeline stood in the doorway, and it was she who had spoken.

"Matter enough!" growled the mine-owner. "That scoundrel, Sandy, has skipped out and taken three thousand dollars of my money with him."

"Oh! mercy, what a bad man! I just came to see him. He sent me a package this morning, accompanied by this strange letter. I didn't know what to make of it, and I just thought I'd bring them here and demand an explanation."

"Let's see the letter!" Mr. Lyons cried, excitedly. "It may throw some light on the matter of the robbery."

Miss Angeline handed him the missive and he opened and perused it, his face growing dark with anger as he did so.

Appended is a copy:

"DEAR MISS LYONS:—

"I hereby send you a valuable package which I wish you to keep for me a few days until I need it. Under no consideration let any one know anything about it, and confer a favor on your true friend,

"SANDY."

"Let's see the package," Mr. Lyons said. "I have an idea that the money is in it."

The package was opened, and, sure enough, there were the three thousand dollars, intact.

"I told you so!" Harry Hawk cried, in triumph. "I suppose you're satisfied now that the great and only Sandy is a thoroughbred rogue."

"I am, indeed, although no light evidence would have convinced me. Fix up and post that placard, and make it a thousand dollars reward for his capture, instead of five hundred. If that amount does not secure his capture I will make it ten thousand, but what I will have satisfaction for the way I have been ill-treated."

"You have the right spirit," Hawk cried, jubilantly. "I would never rest, if it were me, until I succeeded in bringing the fellow to justice."

Mr. Lyons did not reply, but turned and strode from the office, with a troubled expression of countenance—Miss Angeline following him.

After they were gone, Hawk fairly glowed with exultance.

"It couldn't have happened better!" he cried gleefully. "In one stroke everything has been done to a neat turn, and we are safe. Sandy is now an outlaw, and dare not return to expose Cassie for fear of being captured himself. Tonight we will make an effort to rob the other safe, and the crime will of course be laid to Sandy—long enough, anyhow, for us to get safely out of the country. Victory is ours, and we ought to rejoice!"

The report was not long in circulating over the town that Sandy, the handsome superintend-

ent, had absconded with a large amount, of money belonging to Mr. Lyons, and a thousand dollars reward was offered for his capture.

When the news of the damning charge against Sandy reached Kit's ears, he shook his head, a wise expression chasing away the habitual grin upon his face.

"Ther thing ain't settled, yit!" he muttered. "Sandy's got in hot water, and it's plain that evidence hez been worked purty strong against him. But if me an' sis can't git him out o' ther serape it air purty funny-like. Heigh-ho! I wish ter-day's work was done, so I could begin ter move my chessmen toward the endin' of the game."

The old gentleman, who had arrived by the stage was Erastus Douglass, of Philadelphia, and Sandy had reeognized him, as had Kit.

Knowing that his father was after him with a warrant for his arrest, Sandy had believed discretion in such a case to be the better part of valor, and had embraced an opportunity to get out of Ghoul Gulch while time yet remained.

During the afternoon Mr. Erastus Douglass had an interview with the postmaster, after which he paid Mr. Lyons a visit, finding that gentleman alone in his parlor.

After introducing himself, the Philadelphian said:

"Mr. Lyons, I learn that you have had a young man in your employ who is called Sandy."

"Until a very few hours ago I did, and if I am not greatly mistaken you are his father, as I can discern a great resemblance between you."

"I am his father, if I, too, am not mistaken!" the old gent answered. "I am Erastus Douglass of Philadelphia, and proud of the fact I am, for there is not another man in that city who comes of a more aristocratic family. But, most unfortunately, my son Richard is wholly different. He is a scapegrace, a defaulter, and a rascal, and I have sworn that he shall have no further liberty to disgrace my name. I have come to arrest him for embezzling fifty thousand dollars I had intrusted him with."

"I am afraid you will have to find him before you can arrest him," Mr. Lyons said. "He has greatly deceived me. I suppose you are aware that he has robbed me as well as yourself?"

"So I have learned. That is what brought me to see you. I want to know if there is not some way we can work together in this matter in order to effect his capture."

"None that I know of, other than you might offer an extra reward, if you have any idea that it will avail anything."

The Philadelphian looked disappointed.

"I shall take good care he don't escape, if once he is captured!" Douglass declared. "I was always a kind and indulgent parent to him, giving him every opportunity to rise and make a mark for himself in the world, and the way he used me was villainous to say the least, and was the means of breaking up my happy home. On the whole, I think I shall offer an additional reward, for I shall never rest until my guilty son is punished," and the old gent took his departure in a rage.

"Guilty though Sandy be, Erastus Douglass is certainly an unnatural father!" Mr. Lyons reflected after he was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

ALL FOR PLUCK.

THE news of the robbery was conveyed to Laurel Lyons by Miss Angeline, who, together with the new Mrs. Lyons, expressed their heartiest satisfaction.

"I don't believe a word of it!" Laurel declared, stoutly. "Sandy is a gentleman of honor, and no one could even tempt me to believe that he would stoop to commit a theft."

Putting on her hat, she left the house, and made her way down to the diggings, where Kit was acting as overseer over the men that were at work.

He grinned and nodded as she came up, at the same time doffing his hat in true Chesterfieldian style.

"'Afternoon to yer, Miss Laurel!" he said. "Shute me fer a porcupine if I ain't glad ter receive a wisit from ye. Heerd 'bout Sandy, I suppose?"

"Yes. It was to see you concerning the matter, that I came down here. Oh! Kit, it cannot be that it is true about him stealing the money, and running away?"

"Nary time! He's skipped the tra-la-loo, I reckon, but he didn't steal no collat, and ye kin bet yer life on *that!*"

"Yet, how do you account for the strange part about the money and the letter in his handwriting being sent Miss Angeline?"

"Easy enuff.. I had ther legitermut honor o' bearin' them same to ther Lyons Ranch, an' ef my memory ain't all knocked into a cocked hat, I know who give 'em ter me ter tote."

"Oh! Kit, then Sandy did not send them—there is a plot to ruin him?"

"You bet! But, jest you keep as mum as a perarie mouse. Ther hull thing is drawin' to a close, what will clear Sandy, and convict as tart a parcel o' rogues as there is in the whole country. Mind, you keep mum, but note who leaves yer father's shanty ter-night arter the camp is asleep!"

"I will do as you say, Kit. May Heaven reward you if you succeed in clearing the one I love best in all the world!"

"You bet we're goin' ter try!"

"Who?"

"We—me an' ther female mystery of Ghoul Gulch!"

"What! Madam Midnight?"

"You bet! But, jest ye keep yer tongue frozen between yer purty teeth 'til developments begin to unwind. Then thar'll be a breeze wuss than forty cyclones."

"I am so glad there is a good prospect," and Laurel's heart was lighter as she took her leave.

The setting of the sun brought back to the Gulch all who had participated in the search for Sandy.

A fagged out set of men they were, and what made matters worse, the search had been fruitless, not one trace of the superintendent having been found.

Kit's mind had not been idle during the day, and he had formed a few opinions of his own. He was not prepared to believe that Sandy had left the vicinity of Ghoul Gulch for good. He reasoned that his aim would be to communicate

secretly with Laurel and endeavor to persuade her to elope with him.

After supper that night, just as Kit was thinking of starting for the mountain cave, he was accosted by a middle-aged man in the bar-room of the Grand Union, who at the same time motioned him to one side.

"Are you the young fellow they call Kit?" he asked.

"That's me," replied the boy.

"I thought maybe I could learn of you concerning a man, Sandy. He directed me—I'm a deputy sheriff from Leadville—to procure a warrant and requisition from Chicago and come here and arrest three noted thieves and confidence people. On my arrival here I find Sandy has skipped out under the charge of embezzlement."

"Don't yer b'lieve a word of it. I'm here after these daisies, too. They've sprung a sorter trap on Sandy, but I kin onspring it as easy as they sprung it, an' don't ye fergit it! Ter-night is ther time, an' I want yer help. Git tergether a dozen fellers as kin keep mum, an' be ahind this hotel, arter midnight ter-night, an' wait thar till I come fer ye!"

"D'ye expect to pull 'em?"

"Sure as ye'r' born—all 'cept one feller, who's got ter turn State's evidence, in order to clear Sandy's skirts of a couple of charges."

"Have you power to act in this case?"

"Bet I have—right from head-quarters in Chica-wgo. Wull ye be on hand?"

"I shall be only too glad to assist you, young man, if you are sure of your game."

In due time Kit reached the cave in the mountains, and found there awaiting him—Madam Midnight.

Without delay he made known the events of the day in Ghoul Gulch.

"Ther plum is ripe, sis, an' ef we don't pluck it ter-night, you kin bet it's goin' ter fall off ther tree an' bu'st our calylations. We've got big work afore us, an' darned little time ter do it. First of all, we've got ter gobble onter Sandy."

"How is that to be done when we don't know where he is?"

"I jest tickle my ribs that I know whar he is located. It's a tart hiding-place that I discovered when I were comin' ter town."

The woman accordingly retired behind a curtained partition of the cave, and in due time reappeared, "made up" as Madam Midnight, the owner of the Mabille.

The two then quitted the cave, and descended to the gulch-bottom, but, instead of returning toward the town, Kit led the way in the opposite direction.

In the course of half an hour he paused, and pointed to a little bench on the mountain-side, some hundred yards above.

"There's a little hut up there," he said, "and I look to find our man there. Come! but be cautious, for he may hear us coming, and hold us at bay."

He was right. They were but little more than half-way up, when they heard a ringing challenge of "halt!" and saw Sandy's head and arms protruding over the edge of the cliff, a pair of revolvers in the grasp of his hands.

"Halt!" he repeated sternly. "Come a step

further, and I'll blow your brains out. What do you want here?"

"A feller w'ot looks like you!" Kit replied, with a grin. " Didn't 'spect visitors did ye, now?"

"On the contrary, yes, and have prepared a reception for 'em."

"Not fer us, ye ain't. We're friends, ye see, instead of foes."

"Oh! That won't work. My eye don't gloss over for a cent. Go back and tell my father he will never take me alive."

"Neither he will. We've got the hull thing cooked an'dried, an' aire goin' ter feast ter-night. We're jest goin' ter show ther old man a trick wi' a triangle to it."

"I don't understand you!"

"Know ye don't. Ye don't even know yer best friends. We're two bloods from Chicago, an' we're goin' ter prove that ye were robbed o' that fifty thousand!"

"How are you to do it?"

"You'll find out, soon's we git ready ter make developments. Ye don't even know that ye aire accused o' robbin' Lyons's safe?"

"I should say not! Who dares to charge me with such a crime?"

"Money found missin', after you left, Miss Angeline fetches it to light wi' a letter from you tellin' her to keep it fer ye till called for."

"This is infamous!"

"I should ker-snicker; but, don't sweat. Yer humble servant, Christopher Bricktop, hes got the bulge. Ther parties w'ot robbed the little safe, aire goin' ter tackle the big one, ter-night, calculatin' you'll git the blame fer it. We're goin' ter scoop 'em, you bet, and let Steamboat Steve hev a chance fer his white alley, ef he gives Cassie-an' Hawk away."

"How came you to know these people, or of my affairs?" Sandy demanded, still suspicious and on guard.

"You shall learn that when it comes to make a general explanation. Our sole business here is to arrest these thieves, and clear your character of a blemish," now spoke up the woman.

"But, who are *you*? I can form no idea why you interest yourself in my affairs."

"Perhaps not. All will be plain to you, in due time, however. Come! we have very little time to wait, as we wish to lay for Steamboat Steve yet, to-night."

"I don't know whether I will accompany you or not. I fancy your story is only a detective's subterfuge to secure my capture."

"Nonsense. We could have taken you long ago, if it had been our desire. I will guarantee that everything is square, and before morning you can prove to your father's satisfaction that you are innocent of intentionally getting away with the money intrusted to you."

"Yas, she's tellin' yer genuine Scripter frum ther book o' 'Zek'el, Sandy. Ye come wi' us an' we'll fix ye out all in shape, so no one will object to your huggin' Laurel Lyons!" Kit chimed in.

"Well, I reckon I shall have to go 'long with you, but if I detect the least sign of treachery, I'll shoot you quicker'n scat!" he said, descending toward them.

"To prove to you we mean everything as we

have said, when we get back to near camp, you can leave us, and secrete yourself near the Lyons mansion. When you are wanted to participate in the victory, the hoot of an owl will give you warning to come to the front of the mansion, where you will find us."

"Very well. Lead on."

The journey back to camp was made as rapidly as possible, for the evening was well advanced.

When the diggings were reached, Sandy branched off toward the Lyons residence, while Kit and Madam Midnight slowly approached the camp.

"Now, ther next thing fer us ter do, is ter cap ter Steamboat Steve!" Kit said. "If any one o' the gang will squeal on a pal, he's ther hairpin, every time."

"I am of the same opinion, but how to get him into our power, I cannot see."

"Well, there's one plan that may work. You stay here, and I'll reconnoiter. I've an idea. Hawk will stay indoors at the mansion to-night, to prove to Mr. Lyons that he was indoors all night. Such a thought, anyhow, has just occurred to me. I'll go to the Mabille, an' ef I find his jags, Steamboat, thar, an' Hawksy not there, I'll pump him up with ther idea Hawksy wants ter see him down the gulch, an' I'll show him the way—right before yer shooters. Providin' this don't work, I'll come back, an' we'll put cur heads together ter hatch up some other plan."

"Very well, you can try. Be expeditious, however."

Kit accordingly hurried away.

When he arrived at the Mabille he found, as usual, a large percentage of the denizens of the mines there, engaged in various games.

A glance told the boy that Harry Hawk was not present.

Steamboat Steve was, however, and Kit at once approached where he was seated.

"Hello! pardner!" he said, slapping the rogue familiarly on the shoulder. "Be you the tarrier w'ot Hawksy sent me for?"

Steve uttered an oath.

"See hyer, what d'ye mean by bein' so impudent? Who're you, an' w'at d'ye want?"

"My baptismal appendix p'ints ter ther name o' Christopher Bricktop, an' I were prevailed 'pon by one Harry Hawk, in an' fer ther consideration of a V, to wait upon a galoot called Steamboat Steve, an' cornduct him ter ther spot where the party o' the first part stands wi' the mantle o' night wrapped around his corporosity!"

Steamboat Steve gave a quick, scowling glance around, evidently afraid that Kit's volubility would attract attention.

"Shet•yer devilish trap," he hissed, "or I'll throttle ye. Lead the way and I'll foller. How fur's Hawk waitin'?"

"A little furder on."

"Then ye kin skin back; I kin find him, I reckon!"

"Halt! Hands up an' mouth shut, or you are a dead man!" a ringing voice cried, and two revolvers looked the ruffian in the face, with a loud click.

"Yes, Steamship, old socks, ef ye as much as utter a peep, ye'r' a corpus!" Kit cried, jubilant-

ly. "You're our prisoner, an' if ye make a move ter escape, down goes yer apple-cart a-b'ilin'!"

"Ten thousand devils! What do ye mean? What hev I done?" the ruffian growled, white with rage.

"Done enuff, Steamer, ter retire!" K^{os}sponded, produceng some stout straps, we concluded ter not let ye hev a finger pie to-night at the office. Hawksy an' Cassie kin attend to that, an' ef you know where your neck is j'nted ye kin turn State's evidence ag'in' em! or take the consequences all arranged for yer reception by the sheriff's posse."

CHAPTER XII.

A JOLLY ROUND-UP.

WHEN Steamboat Steve learned, by Kit's words, that the plot to rob the big safe was known, he vented terrible oaths, and worked himself into about as furious a passion, as any ordinary man well could do.

"Careful, now!" Madame Midnight cautioned, watching him like a hawk the while, and keeping the muzzles of her revolvers right where he could look down the shining tubes. "Don't attempt to escape, unless you are anxious to die. I warn you! If you submit peaceably, you have chances of escaping the fate that your companions in crime are certain to get. Kit, secure his hands and feet, so that it will be impossible for him to budge."

"There's but one chance fer yer white alley, and ef ye don't improve that I wouldn't give six cents fer yer chances of missin' a life sentence!"

"How d'ye mean?"

"Why, this way: Ef ye squeal on ther clear-through record of Hawksy and Cassie, wi' facts 'bout how ye plucked Sandy an' other sech things, that'll be State's evidence, an' you go scot free. Otherwise you'll have to take yer chances wi' yer two pals."

"Then I'll squeal! I hev 'bout concluded ter quit this kind o' life anyhow, tho' I would hev liked to get a divy of old Lyons's wad, you bet!"

"Undoubtedly. But ye'll never corral a cent ov that till-tap. Now, ye see, arter we gobble onto Harry an' Cassie, we're goin' ter hev sort of a reunion an' explanation, an' you're expected to make a clean breast of the matter."

"Ef I do, shall I have protection?"

"That's just what you'll git. Face about, now, an' march down the gulch, where we'll tie ye to a tree, out o' hearin', till you're wanted. Remember, if you try to run, you'll get a shot in the back what'll take your breath!"

Steamboat Steve made no reply, but shuffled slowly in advance of them, evidently resigned to his fate.

The town was early asleep that night, for one of its wild, wakeful population, for very few lights were to be seen glimmering after one o'clock—even the saloons being closed.

About this time two closely muffled figures in male attire were to be seen standing in front of the Lyons office, in an attitude of listening.

The darkness of the night was complete; a person a short distance away could scarcely have distinguished the two figures.

They were Harry Hawk and Cassie, and were waiting for Steamboat Steve to come.

"The cuss is mighty tardy," growled Hawk. "I want you to get into the safe, and be done with the job as soon as possible. If we were to be caught at this, the goose wouldn't hang so

There's no danger. Open the door. no particular use of waiting for Steve, as there's nothing for him to do. He will probably be along while we are at work."

Having the office key, Hawk obeyed, and they both entered the room, closing the door behind them.

Lighting a candle, for the shutters were tightly closed, Hawk led the way to the huge safe, which reached nearly to the ceiling.

"I can open that in short order, I believe," said the disguised woman, beginning to examine the combination plate.

In ten minutes the door of the safe stood open, and the plundering began.

Package after package was hauled out of the interior.

"There's no time to count it now," decided the woman. "Stuff it into the bag, and we can count it when we get to the house."

Hawk obeyed, and soon had a good-sized bag filled.

The safe was then closed and they left the office and hurried toward the Lyons residence, of course not encountering Steamboat Steve which occurred to them as being strange.

They cautiously entered the mansion, and the front parlor, locking the door after them. No delay was made, then, in lighting a lamp, and beginning the counting of the money out on the floor.

They became so absorbed that no thought of danger entered their minds.

"A hundred thousand here," Cassie announced, stacking up her piles.

"The same here," Hawk echoed. "Eureka! what a fat pile! I propose we divy even, and skip by the back way, and let Steamboat Steve smell for his share!"

"Wouldn't that be a racket though?"

It was the unmistakable deep sonorous voice of the Mississippian that uttered the sarcastic query, and Hawk and Cassie glared around in the direction whence had come the voice.

Two faces grew ghastly pale with alarm, then, and well they might.

The folding-doors between the front and back parlor stood open, and that end of the room was well filled with people, a number of whom held weapons leveled at the astounded safe-robbers.

Foremost among the group were Kit, Madam Midnight, Sandy, Mr. Lyons, Laurel, Mr. Douglass, Steamboat Steve and the Leadville deputy, who was backed by a file of men.

"Well, my gay starks, I see we've got ye, hey?" Kit said, with a chuckle. "Lay ther hull blame on me an' Madam Midnight, here. We're ther hull head o' ther bizness. Ther gent on ther right, there, he be the deputy-sheriff o' Leadville, an has a warrant fer ter take ye back ter Chicago. So jest let him put the bracelets on ye!"

"A million curses on ye all!" Hawk cried, furiously.

"Ye've played yer last skin game an' aire goin' ter git skinned. Deputy, secure them chickens, then I, Christopher Bricktop, hev a few statements to make, which I think concerns several present."

Hawk yielded to being handcuffed with bad grace, while Mr. Lyons gathered up his money, probably about the most dumfounded man in existence.

"Now, then," Kit said, "that couple are known in Chicago as two of the cleverest thieves and cracksmen in the city, Steamboat Steve being their confederate. He has turned State's evidence against them for the consideration of his freedom. Steamboat, what are that pair wanted for in Chicago?"

"Safe-burglary, forgery, abduction, and various acts of villainy."

"Correct. But one particular case is of interest to us. You see this old gentleman here?"

"I do."

"Well, he is a rich speculator, and is hunting a son who got away with fifty thousand dollars. You see this man, Sandy? He is the old man's mutton. You have seen Sandy before?"

"I have."

"Where?"

"In Chicago."

"Under what circumstances?"

"We were workin' men of means. Cassie made his acquaintance, and he came to see her several times. We were there one night when he called, and learning he was heeled, we drugged his wine, went through him for fifty thousand dollars, and after throwing him in the street a mile away, moved to another part of town."

"Is this correct, Sandy?"

"It is. I never could gain track of them, and knowing father would be unforgiving and revengeful, I wrote him I had lost the money, and fled West."

"Are you satisfied now?" Kit asked of the elder Douglass.

"I suppose I shall have to be, with the best grace possible."

"As far as your money is concerned you shall have every penny of it to-morrow!" Madam Midnight said, throwing off her mask. "I have made it, and cleared my brother where you would have crushed him; you even drove me from home because I pleaded for him. I did leave home, went to Chicago, and with the aid of good, brave Kit, ferreted out the whole case down to the present day. Call on me to-morrow, at the Mabille, and I will repay you for Sandy's loss—since it is money you most want."

A cheer greeted her as she turned and swept from the room.

"She's a clipper!" Kit declared, "Now, Mr. Lyons, I suppose you will admit that Sandy has been wronged, an' aire entitled to yer respect an' confidence?"

"Certainly, my brave boy; but how about the first robbery, and the love affair with my sister?"

Kit burst into a roar.

"'Bout the luv scrape, I got that all up, myself, fer devilment, as your daughter, there, knows. The two robberies I overheard planned t'other night, an' the first one were did by Hawksy,

who hired me ter fetch ther forged letter an' money an' give it to the servant for Angeliner. It suited my purpose to be known here as Kit, the Denver Sport. Now, then, Sandy, ye'r' as clear as a whistle, and I wanter see yer kiss yer intended once, fer yours truly, Kit "Bricktop!"

And Sandy did.

The next day, Kit and the deputy-sheriff started for Chicago with their prisoners. Cassie and Hawk were subsequently tried and received severe sentences, while Steamboat Steve escaped prison, as was promised, but with a reputation that no decent man would care to own.

Erastus Douglass returned East, but before he did so, he willingly received fifty thousand dollars from his daughter.

Lily's object being accomplished, she willingly abandoned the to her distasteful business, to keep house for Sandy, who, in time, became an influential and wealthy citizen, and married Laurel, of course; while, upon the same happy occasion, Lily married Mr. Lyons—Cassie having, in the interim, died in prison of a broken spirit, if not of a contrite heart.

Kit, after the conviction of his charges, returned West.

THE END.

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